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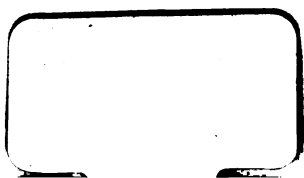
The SONG *of*
THE SIRENS
and Other Stories

EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

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The
SONG OF THE SIRENS
and Other Stories

BY
EDWARD LUCAS WHITE
AUTHOR OF
"EL SUPREMO," "THE UNWILLING VESTAL," ETC.



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PREFACE

A DAY-DREAMER I have been from boyhood, haunted, no matter what my task, by imaginations, mostly approximating some form of fictitious narrative; imaginations beyond my power to banish and seldom entirely within my power to alter, modify or control.

Besides, I have, in my sleep, dreamed many dreams which, after waking, I could remember: some dimly, vaguely, or faintly; others clearly, vividly or even intensely. A majority of these dreams have been such as come to most sleepers, but a minority have been such as visit few dreamers.

Sometimes I wake with the most distinct recollection of a picture, definite and with a multitude of details. Such was the dream, on the night of February 17th, 1906, in which I saw the vision on which is based the tale of *THE SONG OF THE SIRENS*; saw it not as a painted picture, but as if I had been on the cross-trees of a vessel under that intense blue sky, gazing at the magic islet and its portentous occupants. The dream was the more marvelous since there is nothing, either in literature or art, suggesting

anything which I beheld in that vision of the two living shapes.

Often I wake with the sensation of having just finished reading a book or story. Generally I can recall the form and appearance of the book and can almost see the last page: size, shape, quality of paper and kind of type; with every letter of the last sentences.

Such a dream was that from which I woke shuddering, tingling with the horror of the revelation at the end of *THE FLAMBEAU BRACKET*, with the last three sentences of it, word for word as they stand in the story, branded on my sight. Yet I was not able to recall in its entirety the tale I had just read; for, in the dream, the whole action took place on the window-sill, and what was done and said there disclosed all that had gone before and implied, unmistakably, all that was to come after. This superlative artistry I could not attain to in writing the tale.

It has happened that I have dreamed the same dream over and over. Some of these recurrent dreams have repeated themselves many times; a few have recurred at intervals varying from a few nights to many months over periods running into years. The story called *DISLOVA* is told almost exactly as I dreamed it; the ending, from getting my eyes above the level of the

window-sill, once only, on the night of February 20th, 1911; the earlier portion as I dreamed it, sometimes twice weekly, sometimes once in six months or so, over a period of more than twelve years, from early in 1899. Three or four times the dream began with my escape from the massacre of my company by turning on my pursuers in the wood and killing the foremost: generally, however, it began when I woke in the dark in the dream and saw the light twinkling far away across the valley; I, in the dream, recalling all that had gone before. No existent path which my living feet have trod is better known to me than that dream-path from my hiding-place, down to the river-ford and up to the castle-wall; especially the latter part which, in the dream, I knew already by touch from my memories of my youthful acquaintance with it.

During the twelve years throughout which this dream recurred to me my waking meditations dwelt often on conjectures as to what I should find inside that window, if ever I got inside it. But, after all that pondering, the climax of that dream amazed me even more than the climax of the tale will probably startle a sensitive reader. I, in my dream, did not read it; it happened to me. The diabolical ingenuity of it still gives me spinal intuitions.

In many of my dreams I have noted that, while

dreaming, I seem to retain no trace of my waking individuality. In this dream I knew nothing, in respect to food, clothing, housing or any other of the circumstances of life, beyond what would have been known to an Italian condottiere of the fourteenth century. As the dream recurred I came to recognize it for a dream and, while experiencing it in my dream-personality, was able to look on, as it were, in my own personality and con the whole. I was over and over impressed with the entire absence of any feature inappropriate to the locality and period in which the dream seemed to belong, and struck with the uncanny raciness of the Italian in what was said to me. I never could, after waking, recall more than a word or two; but I retained and retain a distinct impression of knowing vastly more Italian in that dream (as in many other dreams) than I know in my proper person.

Stevenson, somewhere, writes of dream-words and of the warped and enhanced significance which real words take on in dreams. So in this. "Bauro," as far as I know, is no Italian name, nor an Italian word, at all. In the dream it appeared, somehow, a well-known dialectic variant of "paura," "fear," and seemed to imply Bauro's ferocity and the dread which he inspired universally.

The title of this tale is taken from a dream

wholly unrelated to the dream of this story, a dream in which I was being shown portfolios of etchings and others of cheap reproductions of the same etchings; my mentor, talking Italian, saying of the reproductions:

“Non sono tavole, sono disvole.”

In the dream these words meant: “These are not pictures, merely near-pictures.” Now “tavola” in Italian is used of no kind of picture except an altar-piece, and “disvola” is not Italian at all, merely a dream-word. Which is just the way in which words behave in dreams, as Stevenson noted.

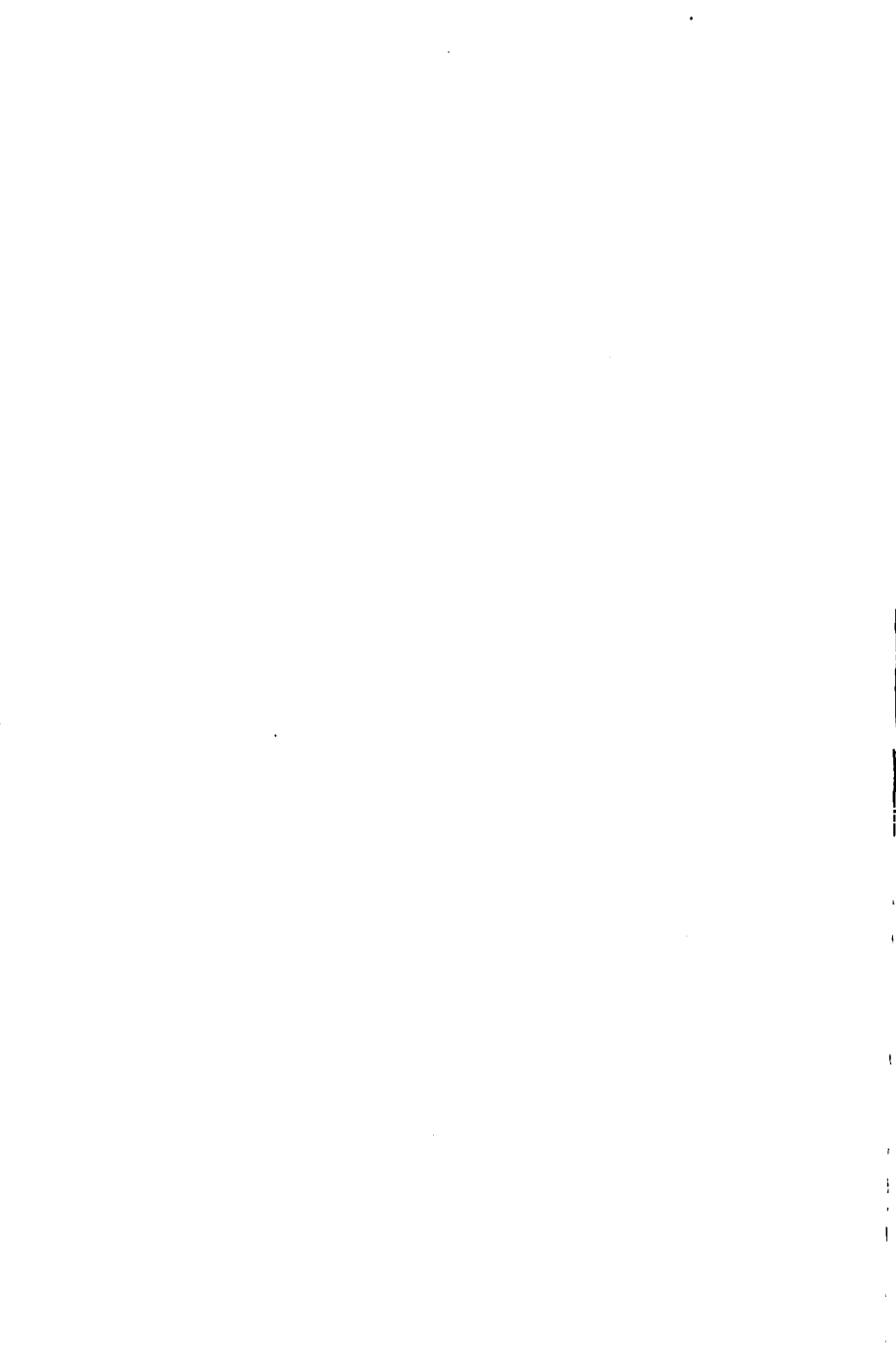
The six tales which follow the first in this collection are, I believe, veracious glimpses of the past, without any marring anachronisms. But *THE SKEWBALD PANTHER* is a product rather of creative impulse than of ripe scholarship. It is, however, to my thinking, too good a story to be spoiled in an attempted rewriting. Accurate later knowledge does not lure me to alterations. The tale's plot pivots on my fantastic youthful misconceptions as to seating-regulations in the Colosseum; and these, while wholly baseless and infinitely improbable, are by no means impossible nor are they out of key with the period-atmosphere; which atmosphere, both social and conversational, is, I believe, veraciously conveyed.

EDWARD LUCAS WHITE.

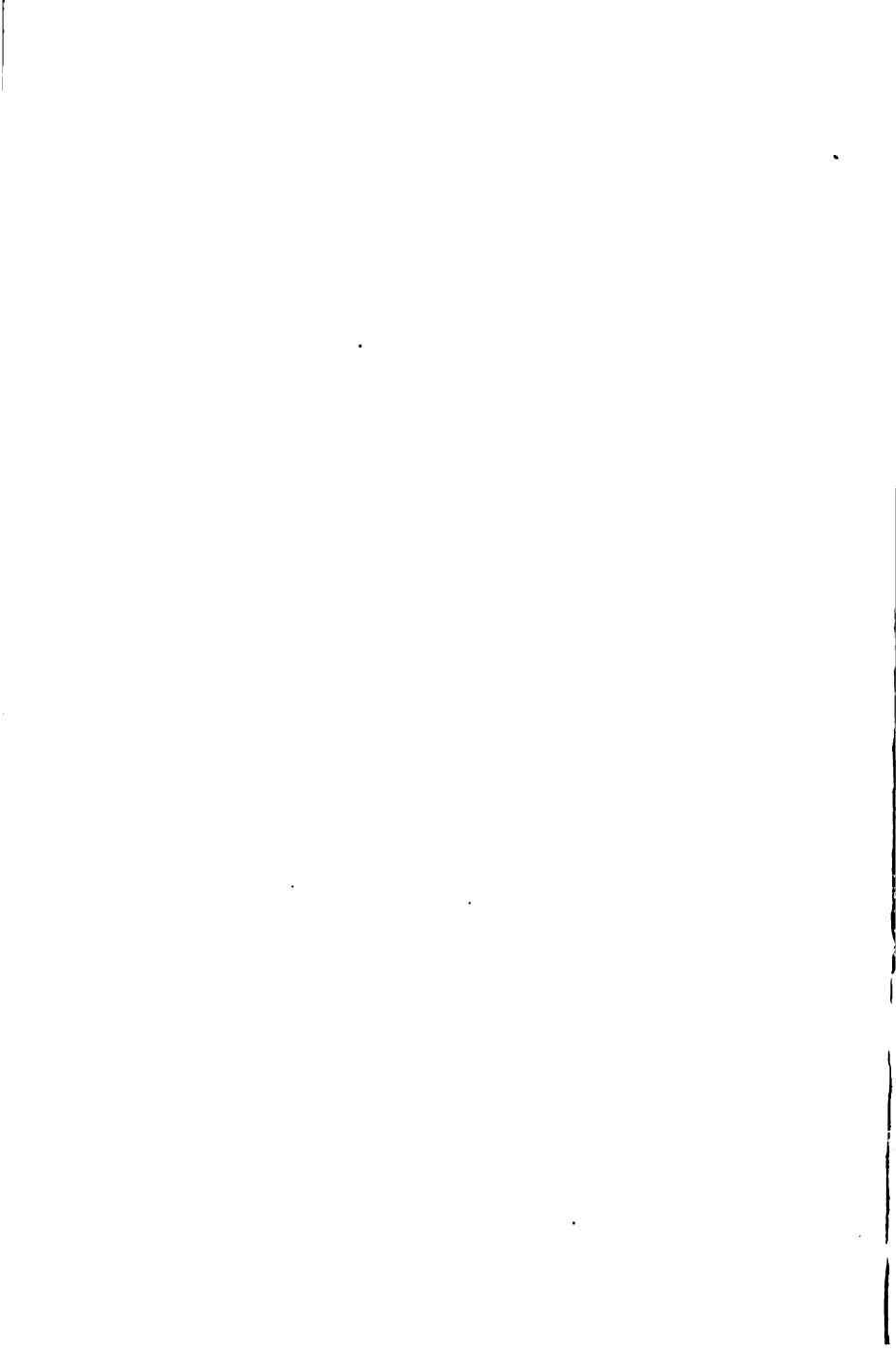


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The
SONG OF THE SIRENS



THE SONG OF THE SIRENS*

I FIRST caught sight of him as he sat on the wharf. He was seated on a rather large seaman's chest, painted green and very much battered. He wore gray, his shirt was navy-blue flannel, his necktie a flaring red bandana handkerchief knotted loosely under the ill-fitting lop-sided collar, his hat was soft, gray felt and he held it in his hands on his knees. His hair was fine, straight and lightish, his eyes china-blue, his nose straight, his skin tanned. His features were those of an intelligent face, but there was in it no expression of intelligence, in fact no expression at all. It was this absence of expression that caught my eye. His face was blank, not with the blankness of vacuity, but with the insensibility of abstraction. He sat there amid the voluble negro loafers, the hurrying stevedores, the shouting wharf-hands, the clattering tackles, the creaking shears and all the hurry and bustle of unloading or loading four vessels, as imperturbable as a bronze statue of Buddha in meditation. His gaze was fixed un-

* Originally published under the title of "The Man Who Had Seen Them," in the *Sunset Magazine*.

varyingly straight before him and he seemed to notice and observe more distant objects; the larger panorama of moving craft in the harbor, the fussy haste of the scuttling tugboats tugging nothing, the sullen reluctance of the urged scows, the outgoing and incoming pungies and schooners, the interwoven pattern they all formed together, the break in it now and again from the dignified passage of a towed bark or ship or from the stately progress of a big steamer. Of all this he seemed aware, but of what went on about him he seemed not only unaware but unconscious, with an impassivity not as if intentionally aloof nor absorbingly pre-occupied but as if utterly unconscious or totally insensible to it all. During my long, fidgety wait that first morning I watched him at intervals a good part of the time. Once a pimply, bloated boarding-master, patrolling the wharf, stopped full in front of him, caught his eye and exchanged a few words with him, otherwise no one seemed to notice him, and he scarcely moved, bare-headed all the while in the June sunlight. When I was at last notified that the *Medorus* would not sail that day, went over her side, and left the pier, I saw him sitting as when I first caught sight of him.

Next morning I found him in almost the same spot, in precisely the same attitude, and with the

same demeanor. He might have been there all night.

Soon after I reached the *Medorus* the second morning the bloated boarding-master came on board with that rarity, a native American seaman. I was sitting on the cabin-deck by the saloon-skylight, Griswold on one side of me and Mr. Collins on the other. Captain Benson, puffy, pasty-faced and shifty-eyed, was sitting on the booby-hatch, whistling in an exasperatingly monotonous, tuneless and meaningless fashion. As soon as the Yankee came up the companion-ladder he halted, turned to the boarding master who was following him and blurted out.

"What! Beast Benson! Me ship with Beast Benson!" And back he went down the ladder and off up the pier.

Benson said never a word, but recommenced his whistling. It was part of his undignified shiftlessness that he aired his shame on deck. Almost any captain, fool or knave or both, would have kept his cabin or sat by his saloon table. Benson advertised his helplessness to crew, loafers and passers by alike.

The boarding master walked up to Mr. Collins and said:

"You see, Sir. I can't do anything. You're lucky enough to be only two hands short for a crew and luckier to have gotten a second mate

to sign. Wilson's the best I can do for first mate. He's willing and he's the only man I can get. Not another boarding-master will so much as try for you."

Mr. Collins kept his irritating set smile, his mean little eyes peering out of his narrow face, his stubby scrubbing-brush pepper-and-salt mustache bristling against his nose. He made no reply to the boarding-master but turned to Griswold.

"You're a doctor, aren't you?" he queried.

"Not yet," Griswold replied.

"Well," said Mr. Collins impatiently, "you know pretty much what doctors know?"

"Pretty much, I trust," Griswold answered cheerfully.

"Can you tell whether a man is deaf or not?" Mr. Collins pursued.

"I fancy I could," Griswold declared, gaily.

"Would you mind testing that man over there for me?" Mr. Collins jerked his thumb toward the impassive figure on the seaman's chest.

Griswold stared.

"He looks deaf enough from here," he asserted.

"Try him nearer," Mr. Collins insisted.

Griswold swung off the cabin deck, lounged over to the companion ladder, went down it leisurely and sauntered toward the seated

mariner. Griswold had a taking way with him, a jaunty manner, an agreeable smile, a charming demeanor and plenty of self-confidence. He usually got on immediately with strangers. So now you could see him win at once the confidence of the man. He looked up at him with a sentient and interested personal glance. They talked some little time and then Griswold sauntered back. He did not speak but seated himself by me as before, lit a fresh cigarette and smoked reflectively.

"Is he deaf?" Mr. Collins inquired.

"Deaf is no word for it," Griswold declared, "an adder is nothing to him. I'll bet he has neither tympanum, malleus, incus nor stapes in either ear, and that both cochleas are totally ossified; that the middle ear is annihilated and the inner ear obliterated on both sides of his head. His hearing is not defective, it is abolished, non-existent. I never saw or heard of a man who impressed me as being so totally deaf."

"What did I tell you?" broke in Captain Benson from the booby-hatch.

"Benson, shut up," said Mr. Collins. Benson took it without any change of expression or attitude.

"You seemed to talk to him," Mr. Collins said to Griswold.

"He can read lips cleverly," Griswold replied. "Only once did I have to repeat anything."

"Did you ask him if he was deaf?" Mr. Collins inquired.

"I did," said Griswold, "and he told the truth instanter."

"Impressed you as truthful, did he?" Mr. Collins queried.

"Notably," Griswold said. "There is a gentlemanly something about him. He is the kind of man you respect from the first, and truthful as possible."

"You hear that, Benson?" Mr. Collins asked.

"What's truthfulness of a pitch-dark night in a gale of wind!" Benson snorted. "The man's stone deaf."

Mr. Collins flared up.

"You may take your choice of three ways," he said, "the *Medorus* tows out at noon. If you can find a first-mate to suit you by then, or if you take Wilson as first-mate, you take her out. If not, I'll find another master for her and you can find another ship."

Benson lumbered off the booby-hatch and disappeared down the cabin companion-way. The cabin-boy came up whistling, went briskly over the side, and scampered some little distance up the pier to where three boarding-masters stood chatting. One of them came back with

him, three or four half sober sailors tagging after him. These he left by the deaf man's sea-chest. Its owner came aboard with him and together they went down into the cabin.

"Look here, Mr. Collins," I said, "I've half a mind to back out of this and stay ashore?"

"Why?" he queried, his little gray eyes like slits in his face.

"I hear this captain called Beast Benson, I see he has difficulty in getting a crew and before me you force him to take a deaf mate. An unwilling crew, a defective officer and an unpopular captain seem to me to make a risky combination."

"All combinations are risky at sea, as far as that goes," said Mr. Collins easily. "Most crews are unwilling and few captains popular. Benson is not half a bad captain. He always has bother getting a crew because he is economical of food with them. But you'll find good eating in the cabin. He has never had any trouble with a crew, once at sea. He is cautious, takes better care of his sails, rigging and tackle than any man I know, is a natural genius at seamanship, humoring his ship, coaxing the wind and all that. And he is a precious sharp hand to sell flour and buy coffee, I can tell you. You'll be safe with him. I should feel perfectly safe with him. I'm sorry I can't go, I can tell you."

"But the deaf mate," I persisted.

8 THE SONG OF THE SIRENS

"He has good discharges," said Mr. Collins, "and is well spoken of. He's all right."

At that moment the boarding-master came out of the cabin and went over the side. Two of the sailors picked up the first-mate's chest and it was soon aboard. The two men went down into the cabin to sign articles. As they went down and as they came up I had a good look at them. One was a Mecklenburger, a lout of a hulking boy, with an ugly face made uglier by loathsome swellings under his chin. The other was a big, stout Irishman, his curly hair tousled, his fat face flushed, his eyes wild and rolling with the after-effects of a shore debauch. His eyes were notable, one bright enamel-blue, the other skinned-over with an opaque, white, film. He lurched against the companion-hatch, as he came up, and half-rolled, half-stumbled forward. He was still three-quarters drunk.

The *Medorus* towed out at noon. Mr. Collins and Griswold stayed aboard till the tug cast loose, about dusk. After that we worked down the bay under our own sail. Even in the bay I was seasick and for some days I took little interest in anything. I had made some attempt to eat, but beyond calling the first-mate Mr. Wilson and the second mate Mr. Olsen, my brief stays at table had profited me little. I had brought a steamer-chair with me and lolled in

it most of the daylight, too limp to notice much of anything.

I couldn't help noticing Captain Benson's undignified behavior. A merchant captain, beyond taking the sun each morning and noon and being waked at midnight by the mate just off watch to hear his report, plotting his course on his chart and keeping his log, concerns himself not at all with the management of his ship, except when he takes the wheel at the critical moment of tacking, or of box-hauling, if the wind changes suddenly, or when a dangerous storm makes it incumbent upon him to take charge continually. Otherwise he leaves all routine matters to the mate on watch. Benson transgressed sea-etiquette continually in this respect. He was forever nosing about and interfering with one or the other mate in respect to matters too small for a self-respecting captain's notice. His mates' contempt for him was plain enough, but was discreetly veiled behind silent lips, expressionless faces and far-off eyes. The men were more open and exchanged sneering glances. The captain would sit on the edge of the cabin-deck, his feet dangling over the poop-deck, and continually nag the steersman, keeping it up for hours.

"Keep her up to the wind," he would say, "keep that royal lifting."

"Aye, aye, Sir," would come from the man at the wheel.

Next moment the captain would call out:

"Let her go off, you damn fool. You'll have her aback!"

"Let her go off, Sir," the victim would reply.

Presently again Benson would snarl:

"Where are you lettin' her go to? Keep her up to the wind."

"Keep her up to the wind, Sir," would come the reply and so on in maddening reiteration.

A day or two after we cleared the capes the big one-eyed Irishman had the wheel. His name, I found afterwards, was Terence Burke and he was from Five Rivers, Canada. He had been a mariner all his life; knew most of the seas and ports of the world. He was especially proud of having been in the United States Navy and of his Civil War record. He had been one of the seamen on the *Congress* or the *Cumberland*, I forget which, and graphic were his descriptions of his sensations while the *Merrimac's* shells were tearing through the helpless ship, the men lying flat in rows on the farther side of the decks, and the six-foot live-oak splinters, deadly as the bits of shell themselves, flying murderously about as each shell burst; of how they took to their boats after dark, and reached the shore, expecting to be captured every moment; of how

they saw the Ericsson's lights (Burke always called the *Monitor* the *Ericsson*) coming in from the sea, and took heart. Burke was justly proud that he had been one of the men detailed, as biggest and strongest, to work the Ericsson's guns, and that he had helped fight her big turret guns in her famous first battle.

All this about Burke I did not learn till many days later. But it was plain to be seen, even by a sea-sick land-lubber, that he was an able seaman, seasoned, competent and self-respecting. All that was manifest all over him as he stood at the wheel. Likewise it was plain that he had brought liquor aboard with him, for he was still half-drunk, and quarrelsome drunk. Even I could see that in his attitude, in his florid face, in his boiled eye. But Captain Benson did not see it when presently he came on deck and seated himself on the edge of the cabin-deck. He cocked his eye up the main-mast and presently growled.

"Let her go off."

Burke shifted the wheel a quarter of a spoke, his jaws clenched, his lips tight shut.

Benson chewed on his big quid and kept his eye aloft. Again he growled:

"Keep her up to the wind."

Burke shifted the wheel back a quarter of a spoke, again without any word.

"I'll learn ye sea-manners," Benson snarled,

"I'll learn ye to repeat after me what I say. Do ye hear me?"

"Aye, aye, Sor," Burke replied, smartly enough.

Shortly Benson came at him again.

"Let her go off, you damn fool."

"Let her go off, you damn fool, Sor," Burke sang out in a rasping Celtic roar which carried to the jibboom.

It was Olsen's watch and the big Norseman was standing by the weather-rigging, his hand on one of the main shrouds. He grinned broadly, full in Captain Benson's face and then looked away to windward. Burke was clutching the spokes as if he were ready to tear them out of the wheel. He looked fighting mad all over. Captain Benson looked aft at him, looked forward, looked aloft, and then rose and went below without a word. Henceforward he worried the steersman no more, unless it were Dutch Charlie, the big loutish boy with the ulcerated chin, or Pomeranian Emil, a timid Baltic waif. Burke and the other full-grown men he let alone.

Next day Burke looked drunker and more belligerent than ever. I noted it, even in my half-daze of flabby nauseated weakness, which subdued me so totally that not even a beautiful and novel spectacle revived me. It was just before noon. The captain and the first-mate had

come on deck with their sextants to determine our latitude. The day was fine with a gentle steady breeze, a clear sky and unclouded sunlight, over all the white-capped blue waters. Smoke sighted a little before turned out to be that of a British man-of-war. Just as the captain told the man at the wheel to make it eight-bells, the man-of-war crossed our bows, all white paint and gilding, her ensign spread, flags everywhere, her band playing and her crew manning the yards. The cabin-boy said it was an English bank-holiday, and that she was bound for Bermuda. I was too flaccid to ask further or to care. I made no attempt to go below for the noon meal. I lay at length in my chair. While the captain and mates were at their dinner I could hear loud voices from the forecastle, or perhaps round the galley door. Presently the first-mate came on deck. He walked to starboard, which was to windward, and stood staring after the far off smoke of the vanished man-of-war. He was a tall, clean-built square-shouldered man, English in every detail of movement, attitude and demeanor. He interested me, for in spite of his expressionless face he looked far too intelligent for his calling. I was watching him when I was aware of Burke puffing and snorting aft along the main deck. He puffed and snorted up the port companion-ladder to the

poop-deck. His face was redder than ever and his eyes redder than his face. He carried a pan of scouse or biscuit-hash or some such mess. He approached the first-mate from behind and hailed him.

"Luke at thot, Sor," he said, "uz thot fit fude fur min?"

The mate, unaware of his presence, did not move or speak.

"Luke at thot Oi say," Burke roared, "uz thot fit to fade min on?"

The mate remained immobile.

Burke gave a sort of snarling howl, hurled at the mate the pannikin, which hit him on the back of the head, its contents going all over his neck and down his collar. As he threw it Burke leaped at the officer. He whirled round before he was seized and met the attack with a short, right-hand jab on Burke's jaw. There was not enough swing in the blow to down the sailor. He clutched both lapels of the mate's open pea-jacket and pulled him forward. The force the mate had put into the blow, and the impetus it had imparted to Burke, besides his sideways wrench, took the mate half off his feet. He got in a second jab, this time with his left hand, but again too short to be effective. Both men lurched toward the booby-hatch and the inside breast-pockets of the mate's jolted jacket

cascaded a shower of letters upon the deck, which blew hither and thither to port. My chair was on the cabin-deck just above the port companion-ladder. The booky man's instinct to save written paper shook me out of my lethargy. In an instant I was out of my chair, down the ladder and picking up the scattered envelopes. Not one, I think, went over-board. I saved three by the port rail and a half a dozen more further in-board. As I scrambled about from one to the other I glanced again and again at the men struggling on the other side of the booby-hatch. The mate had not lost his footing. His short-arm jabs had pushed Burke back till he lost hold of the pea-jacket. The Irishman gathered himself for a rush, the mate squared off, in perfect form, met the rush with a left-hand upper cut on the seaman's chin, calculated his swing and planted a terribly accurate right-hand drive full in Burke's face. He went backward over the starboard companion-ladder down into the main deck.

Paying no more attention to him the mate turned to pick up his letters. He found several on the deck against the booby-hatch, and one by the break of the cabin. Then he looked about for more. I stepped unsteadily toward him and handed him those I had gathered up. In gathering them it had been impossible for me to help

noting the address, and the stamps and the post-marks, which on several were English, on two or three French, on two Italian, on one German, on one Egyptian and on one Australian. The address the same on all, was:

GEOFFREY CECIL, ESQ.

C.O. ALEXANDER BROWN & SON

Baltimore, Maryland,
U. S. A.

Instinctively I turned the packet face down as I handed it to him. He took it gracefully and in his totally toneless voice said:

"Thank you very much."

As he said the words Captain Benson appeared in the cabin companion-way, his revolver in his hands. The mate in the act of stowing with his left hand the letters in his inner breast-pocket, pointed his extended index finger at the pistol.

"Put that thing away!" he commanded.

The voice was as toneless as before, but far otherwise than the blurred British evenness of his acknowledgment to me, these words rang hard and sharp. Benson took the rebuke as if he had been the mate and the other his captain, turned and shuffled fumblingly back down the companion-way. As he passed the pantry door

the cabin-boy whipped out of it and popped up the companion-way to see, and the big Norse mate emerged deliberately behind him.

By this time the fat negro steward and most of the crew had come aft and gathered about the prostrate Burke.

The first-mate cleared the scouse from his neck and collar, took some tarred marline from an outside pocket of his pea-jacket, and in a leisurely way went down into the waist. He had the men turn Burke over and tie his hands behind him and his ankles together. Then he had buckets of sea-water dashed over him. Burke soon regained consciousness.

"Carry him forward and put him in his bunk," the mate commanded. "When he says he will behave cut him loose."

Captain Benson had come on deck and was standing by the booby-hatch.

"That man ought to be put in irons," he said as the mate turned.

The mate's eyes were on his face as he said it.

"He needs no irons," he retorted crisply. "Why make a mountain out of a mole-hill."

I had been hoping that I was getting used to the sea, for I was only passively uncomfortable and mildly wretched. But sometime that night it came on to blow fresh and I waked acutely sea-sick and suffering violently from horrible

surging qualms in every joint. I clambered out of my bunk, struggled into some clothes and crawled across the cabin and up the after companion-way to the wheel-deck. There I collapsed at full length into four inches of warm rain water against the lee-rail. At first the baffling breeze was comforting after the stuffy cabin, smelling of stale coffee, damp sea-biscuit, prunes, oilskins and what not. But I was soon too cold, for I was vestless and coatless, and before long my teeth were chattering and I had a general chill to add to my misery. It was the first-mate's watch and coming aft on his eternal round he found me there. He at once went below and brought me not only vest and jacket but my mackintosh also. I was wet to the skin all over, but the mackintosh was gratefully warm. Forgetting that he could not hear I thanked him inarticulately, and relapsed into my shifting pond, where I slipped into oblivion, my head on the outer timber, the tearing dawn-wind across my face.

Sometime before noon I was again in my chair, as on the day before, and it was again the first-mate's watch. Again I saw Burke come aft. He was not puffing and snorting this time, but very silent. His florid face was a sort of gray-brown. His head was tied up and the bandage tilted sideways over his bad eye. He

came up to port companion ladder half way from the waist of the poop-deck. There he stood holding on to the top of the rail, looking very humble and abashed. It was some time before the first-mate noticed him or deigned to notice him. In that interval Burke said a score of times:

"Mr. Willson, Sor."

Each time he realized that he was ignored he waited meekly for a chance to try again. Finally the mate saw him speak and asked:

"What is it, Burke?"

Burke began to pour out a torrent of speech.

"Come here," said the mate.

When Burke was close to him he said:

"Speak slow."

"Shure Sor," he said, "ye wudn't go fur to call ut mut'ny whan a man's droonk an' makes a fule of himsilf?"

"Perhaps not," the mate replied, his steady eyes on Burke's face.

"Ye, wudn't, I know," Burke went on confidently. "Ye see, Sor, Oi was half droonk whan Oi cum aboard. An' Oi had licker tu, more fule Oi. Mr. Olsen, he cum forrard in the dog-watch afther ye'd taat me me place, and he routed ut out an' hove ut overboord. Oi'm sobered now Sor, with the facer ye giv me an' the cowl'd wather an' the slape, Oi'm sobered, an' Oi'm

sobered for the voyage, Sor. Ye'll foind me quoite and rispectful Sor. Oi was droonk Sor, an' the scouse misloiked me, an' Oi made a fule ov mesilf. Ye'll foind me quoite and rispectful, Sor, indade ye wull. Ye wudn't go for to log me for mut'ny for makin' a fule ov mesilf Sor, wud ye now, Sor?"

"No, Burke," said the mate. "I shall not log you. Go forward."

Burke went.

Some days later I was forward on the fore-castle deck, ensconced against the big canvas-covered anchor, leaning over the side and watching the foam about the cut-water and the upspurted coveys of sudden flying fish, darting out of the waves, at the edge of the bark's shadows and veering erratically in their unpredictable flights. Burke, barefoot and chewing a large quid, was going about with a tar-bucket, swabbing mats and other such devices. He approached me.

"Mr. Ferris, Sor," he said, "ye wudn't have a bit of washin' a man cud du for ye? Ye'll be strange loike aboard ship, an' this yer foorst voyge, an' ye the only passenger, an' this a sailin' ship, tu. Ye'll be thinkin' ov a hotel, Mr. Ferris, Sor. An' there's no wan to du washin' here fur ye, Sor. The naygur cuke is no manner ov use

tu ye. Ye giv me anny bits ye want washed an Oi'll wash 'em nate fur ye. A man-o-war's man knows a dale ov washin' an' ye'll pay me wut ye loike. Thin I'll not be set ashore in Rio wud-out a cint, Sor."

"You'll have your wages," I hazarded.

"Not with Beast Benson," he replied, "little duh ye know Beast Benson. Oi know um. Wut didn't go into me advances ull go into the shlop-chest. Oi may have a millrace or maybe tu at Rio, divil a cint moor."

This was the beginning of many chats with Burke. He told me of Five Rivers, of his life on men-of-war, of his participation in the battle between the *Merrimac* and the *Ericsson*, as he called the *Monitor*, of unholy adventures in a hundred ports, of countless officers he had served under.

"An' niver wan uz foine a gintlemin uz Mr. Willson," he would wind up. "Niver wan ov them all. Shure, he's no Willson. He ships as John Willson, Liverpool. Now all the seas knows John Willson ov Liverpool. There's thousands ov him. He's afloat all over the wurruld. He's always the same, short and curly-headed, black-haired and dark-faced, ivery John Willson is loike ivery other wan. Ivery Liverpool Portugee uz John Willson whin he cooms to soign articles. But Mr. Willson's no Dago,

no Liverpool man at all. He's a gintlemin, British all over, an' a midlander at thot an' no seaman be naature at all. But he's the gintlemin. Ye saa him down me. He's the foine gintlemin. Not a midshipman or liftenant did iver Oi see a foiner gintlemin than him, and how sinsible he uz. Haff the officers Oi've served under wuz lunies, sinsible on this or thot, but half lunny on most things and lunny all over on this or thot. But luke at Mr. Willson. Sinsible all over he uz, sinsible all thru. Luke at the discipline he huz. An' no wunder. Luke at huz oi! He cudn't du a mane thing av he wanted tu, he cudn't tell a loi av he throid, thrust me Soi, Oi know, the min knows. It's loike byes at skule wid a tacher, or min in the army wid their oficers. You can't fule thim, they knows, an' wull they knows a man whin they say wan. Oi'd thrust Mr. Willson annywhere and annyhow. So wud anny other sailor man or anny man. Deef he uz, deaf as an anchor fouled on a rock bottom. But he hears wid huz eyes, wid huz fingers, wid the hull skin av him. He's all sinse an' trewth an' koindness."

Not any other of the sailors besides Burke did I find sociable or communicative or capable, apparently, of intelligent intercourse. Of the captain I saw and heard enough, and more than

enough, at meal times. He deserved his nickname and I avoided him with detestation.

The second mate, a big Norwegian named Olaf Olsen, was a kindly soul, but dull and uncommunicative. He had a companionable eye, but felt neither any need of converse nor any promptings toward it. Speech he never volunteered, questions he answered monosyllabically. One Sunday indeed he so far unbent as to ask if he might borrow one of my books. I told him I doubted if any would please him. He looked them over disappointedly.

"Have you any books of Doomuses?" he queried.

"Doomus?" I repeated after him reflectively.

"You're a scholar, aren't you?" he demanded.

"I aim to be," I said.

"How do you pronounce, D-u-m-a-s?" he inquired.

"I am no Frenchman," I told him, "but Dumás is pretty close to it."

"That's what I said," he shouted, "and they all laughed at me and said 'Doomus, ye damn fool.' Have you any of his books?"

"No," I confessed and he ceased to regard me as worth borrowing from.

Not so Mr. Wilson. Before we ran into the doldrums I had found my sea-legs and exhausted the diversion of learning the name of every bit

of rope, metal and wood on the bark, and also the amusement of climbing the rigging. I settled down to luxurious days of reading. The first Sunday afterwards Mr. Wilson asked for a book. I took him into my cabin and showed him my stock, one-volume poets mostly, the Iliad, the Odyssey, the Greek Anthology, Dante, Carducci, Goethe, Heine, Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne and Rosetti, and a dozen volumes of Hugo's lyrics. I watched him as he conned them over and thought I saw his eyes light over the Greek volumes, thought I saw in them both desire and resignation. He took Milton to begin on and afterwards borrowed my English books in series. I believe he read each entire, certainly he read much during his watches below.

At first I felt equal only to the English myself. But after we entered the glorious south-east trades, I read first Faust, then the Divina Commedia, then the Iliad, and, as our voyage neared its end gave myself up to the delights of the Odyssey.

Meanwhile I had come to feel very well acquainted with the deaf mate. Generally we had spent part of each fair Sunday in conversation. He read lips so instantly and accurately that if I faced the sun and he was close to me we talked almost as easily as if he had heard

perfectly. The conversations were all of his making. He was not a man whom one would question, whereas he questioned me freely after he had made sure, but very delicately managed tentative beginnings, that I did not at all object to being questioned. He was a little stiff at first, half timid, half wary. When he found in me no disposition to intrude upon his reserve, and felt my manner untinged by either condescension, which I did not feel, or curiosity, which I sedulously repressed, he surrendered himself somewhat to the pleasure of exchanging ideas as an equal with a man of his own kind. We came to an unspoken understanding and talked openly on a level footing as two men of education, as two aspirants after culture. He relaxed his caution sufficiently to discard any concealment of his attainments and we discussed freely not only my books which he had borrowed but also whatever I had in hand. He never let slip anything which could tell me whether his spiritual background had been Oxford or Cambridge, yet I knew that only at one or the other could he have developed the mind he revealed.

Toward the end of the voyage our day-time chats usually began with his asking what I was reading. Even in the midst of the steady routine of his unremitting seamanly diligence he often paused by my chair on a week-day and delighted

me with a brief talk which I enjoyed as much as he. Our Sunday talks came to take up much of his deck-watches. But what most delighted me was to listen to his monologues at night. Monologues they were, for I could neither interrupt nor reply. He would begin his watch by a double turn round the bark, twice speaking to the steersman, twice to the lookout. Then he would pace the poop-deck, just aft of the break, from rail to rail. As he turned by the lee rail he would throw a comprehensive glance over the whole spread of the bark's canvas, so he turned by the weather rail he would stoop down, peer out under the mainsail and sweep his eyes along the horizon on our lee bow. In the early part of our voyage I had watched him night after night keep this up for an entire watch, evenly as an automaton, breaking it only by three rounds of the vessel made precisely on the hours. After we grew to know each other he would patrol the deck only at intervals, spending most of his watch seated on the cabin-deck at the break, on the rail or on the booby-hatch, according to the position of my chair. He mostly began.

"Have you ever read——?" Or,

"Did you ever read——?"

Sometimes I had read the book, oftener I had not. In either case I was fascinated by his sane,

cool judgment, equally trenchant and subtle, and by the even flow of his well-chosen words.

Our voyage neared its end sooner than I had anticipated. The south-east trades had been almost head winds for us and we had tacked through them close-hauled, a long leg on the port tack and a short leg on the starboard. Then the proximity of the land blurred the unalterable perpetuity of the trade winds and on a Sunday morning the wind came fair. It was my first experience of running before the wind and it intoxicated me with elation. We were out of sight of land, even of its loom, yet no longer in blue water, but over that enormous sixty-fathom shelf which juts out more than a hundred miles into the Atlantic between Bahia and Rio de Janiero, or to be more precise, between Canavieiras and Itapemirim. The day was bright and the sky sufficiently diversified with clouds to vary pleasingly its insistent blue, the sea a pale, golden green all torn by racing white-caps and dappled with the scurrying shadows of the clouds. The bark leapt joyously, the combers overtaking her charged in smothers of foam past each counter, the delight of merely living in such a glorious day infected even the crew.

I had my chair amidships by the break of the deck, just abaft the booby-hatch. There I was

reading the *Odyssey*. The mate came and sat down by me on the booby-hatch.

"What are you reading?" he asked as usual.

"About the Sirens," I answered.

The strangest alteration came over his expression.

"Did you ever notice," he asked, "how little Homer really tells about them?"

"I was meditating on just that," I replied. "He tells only that there were two of them and that they sang. I was wondering where the popular notions of their appearance came from."

"What is your idea of the popular notions of their appearance?" he demanded.

"I have a very vague idea," I confessed. "They are generally supposed to have had bird's feet. It seems to me I have seen figures of them as so depicted on Greek tombs and coins. And there is Boecklin's picture."

"Boecklin?" he ruminated. "The Munich man? The morbid man?"

"If you choose to call him so?" I assented. "I shouldn't call him morbid."

"His ugly idea is a mere personal conception," he said.

"I grant you that," I agreed, "as far as the age and the ugliness go. But the birds' feet of some kind are in the general conception."

"The general conception is wrong," he as-

serted, with something more like an approach to heat than anything I had seen in him.

"You seem to feel very sure," I replied.

"I do not feel," he answered, "I know."

"How do you know?" I inquired.

"I have seen them," he asserted.

"Seen them?" I puzzled.

"Yes, seen them," he asseverated. "Seen the twain Sirens under the golden sun, under the silver moon, under the countless stars; watched them singing as they are singing now!"

"What?" I exclaimed.

My face must have painted my amazement, my tone must have betrayed my startled bewilderment.

His face went scarlet and then pale. He sprang up and strode off to the weather rail. There he stood for a long time. Presently he wheeled, crossed the deck, the booby-hatch between us, and plunged down the cabin companion-way without looking at me.

He did not once meet my eye during the remaining days of the voyage, let alone approach me. He was again the impassive, inscrutable figure I had first seen him on the wharf at Baltimore.

We drew near Rio harbor, late of a perfect tropic September day, just too late to enter before sunset. In the brief tropic dusk we

anchored under the black beetling shoulder of Itaipu inside the little islands of Mai and Pai. There we lay wobbling at anchor, there I watched the cloudless sky fill with the infinite multitudes of tropic stars, and gazed at the lights of the city, plainly visible through the harbor mouth between Morro de Sao Joao and the Sugar Loaf, twinkling brighter than the stars, not three miles away.

It must have been somewhere toward midnight when he approached me. My chair was by the rail on which he half sat, leaning down to me. So placed he began such a monologue as I had often heard from him, a monologue I could neither question nor modify, which I must listen to entire or break off completely.

"You were astonished," he said, "when I told you I had seen the Sirens, but I have. It was about six years ago, in 1879. I was in New York and I had my usual difficulty getting a ship on account of my deafness. My boarding-master tried a Captain George Andrews of the *Joyous Castle*. Andrews looked me over and said he liked me. Then he talked to me alone.

"'We are bound on an adventure,' he said, 'and I want a man who will obey orders and keep his mouth shut.'

"I told him I was his man for whatever risk. With a light mixed cargo, hardly more than half

a cargo, hardly more than ballast, we cleared for Guam and a market. I was second mate. The first mate was a big Swede named Gustave Obrink. The very first meal I ever sat down to with him he made an impression on me as one of the greediest men I had ever seen. He not only ate enormously, but he seemed more than half unsatisfied after he had stuffed himself with an amazing quantity of food. He seemed to possess an unbluntable zest in the act of swallowing, an ever fresh gusto for any and every food flavor. I never saw a man relish his food so. He was an equally inordinate drinker, the quantity of coffee he could swill at one meal was amazing. Between meals he was always thirsty and drank incredible quantities of water. He was forever going to the butt by the galley door and drinking from it. And he would smack his lips over it and enjoy it as a connoisseur would a rare wine.

"When we came to choose watches Captain Andrews told us to choose a bo'sun for each watch. Obrink wanted to know why.

"The captain told him it was none of his business to ask questions. The Swede assented and backed down. We chose each an Irishman. Obrink, a tall, loose-jointed man named Pat Ryan and I, a compact stocky fellow named Mike Leary. Next day the captain had the boatswains

shift their dunnage and bunk and mess aft. They were nearly as great gluttons as Obrink. They fed like animals and the subject of food and drink was the backbone of their conversation.

"The crew were hearty eaters as well and Captain Andrews catered to their likings. The *Joyous Castle* was amazingly well found, the cabin fare very abundant and varied, the fore-castle food plenty and good.

"Soon after Captain Andrews was sure that the crew had entirely sobered up from their shore-drinking he called them aft one noon and announced that the steward was to serve grog daily until further notice. Naturally they cheered. After that we had a good, cheap wine daily in the cabin. When Captain Andrews had made up his mind that both mates and both boatswains were sober men he had a bottle of whisky placed on the rack over the table and kept filled. It was a curiosity to watch Obrink, Ryan and Leary patronize that bottle. Not one of the three but was cautious, not one of the three but could have drunk three times as much as he did. But the way they savored every drop they took, the affectionate satisfaction they exhibited over each nip, their eager anticipation of the next made a spectacle.

"Captain Andrews kept good discipline, we

crossed the line and rounded the cape of Good Hope without any event.

"When we were off Madagascar, Obrink, going below to get his sextant, missed it from its place. The ship was searched and Captain Andrews held an inquisition. But the sextant was never found, nor any light thrown on how it had disappeared. After that the captain alone took the observations.

"Then began a series of erratic changes of our course. We kept on dodging about for six weeks, until the crew talked of nothing else and openly said the captain was trying to lose us; certainly not one of us except the captain could have designated our position. We knew we were south of the line, not ten degrees south of it, and between 50 and 110 east longitude, but within those limits we might be almost anywhere.

"We had had nothing that could be called a storm since we left New York. When a storm struck us it was a storm indeed. When it blew over it left us making water fast. After a day and a night at the pumps, we took to our boats. Captain Andrews had the cook and the cabin boy in his boat, gave each boatswain a dory and two men, and directed us to steer north by east. When Obrink and I asked for our latitude and longitude he said that was his business. He had had the boats provisioned while we pumped and

they were well supplied. We left the ship under a clear sky, the wind light after the storm, the ground-swell running heavy and slow. We lowered near sunset.

"Next morning the Captain's boat had vanished, and there we were, two whale boats, two dories, twenty men in all and no idea of our position.

"The third day we sighted land. It was a low atoll, not much more than a mile across, nearly circular as far as we could make out, with the usual cocoa palms all along its ring, the surf breaking on interrupted reefs off shore, and, as we drew nearer, a channel into the lagoon facing us; as we threaded it we saw about the center of the lagoon a steep, narrow, pinkish crag, maybe fifty feet high, with a bit of flat island showing behind it. Otherwise the lagoon was unbroken. We made a landing on the atoll near the channel where we had entered, found good water, cocoanuts in abundance and hogs running wild all about, but no traces of human beings. I shot a hog and the men roasted it at once. As they ate they talked of nothing but the short rations they had had in the boats. They were all docile enough and good natured, but I believe every man of them said a dozen times how much he missed his grog and, Obrink, who had kept himself and his boat-load well in hand, said a

score of times how much he would like to serve out grog, but must take care of his small supply. They talked a great deal of their hunger in the boats and of their relish for the pork; they ate an astonishing number of cocoanuts. It seemed to me that they were as greedy a set of men as could be met with.

"We cut down five palm-trees, and on supports made of the others set one horizontally as a ridge pole. Over this we stretched the sails of the whale-boats. So we camped on the sand-beach of the lagoon. I slept utterly. But when I waked I understood the men one and all to complain of light and broken sleep, of dreams, of dreaming they heard a queer noise like music, of seeming to continue to hear it after they woke. They breakfasted on another hog and on more cocoanuts.

"Then Obrink told me to take charge of the camp. I agreed. He had everything removed from his whale-boat and into it piled all the men, except a little Frenchman who went by no name save 'Frenchy,' a New Englander named Peddicord, a short red-headed Irishman named Mullen, Ryan, my boatswain and myself. Those of my watch who wanted to go I let go. They rowed off, across the lagoon toward the pink crag.

"After Obrink and the men were gone I meant

to take stock of our stores. I sent Ryan with Frenchy around the atoll in one direction and Peddicord, who had sense for a foremast hand, with Mullen in the other direction. I then went over the stores. Fairly promising for twenty men they were, even a random boat-voyage in the Indian Ocean. With unlimited cocoanuts and abundant hogs they were a handsome provision, and need only be safeguarded from the omnipresent rats.

"Very shortly my four men returned, the two parties nearly at the same time. It was nearly noon, and no sign of Obrink or the boat. I had followed the whale-boat with my glass till it rounded the pink crag, a short half mile away, and had disappeared. Ryan asked my permission to take one dory and go join the rest on the crag. I readily agreed, for I had not yet cached the spirits. They rowed off as the others had.

"I made use of their welcome absence to conceal the liquor in four different places, carefully writing, in my note-book, the marks by which I was to find the caches again. I did the like with most of the ammunition. I had no idea of trying to get the upper hand of Obrink. I meant to tell him of my proceedings and expected him to approve.

"I expected the men back about two hours before sunset. No sign of them appeared. No

sign of them near sunset, nor at sunset. Of course I had waited inactive till it was too late for me to venture alone on the unknown lagoon at night, and there would have been no sense in one man going to look for nineteen anyhow. Moreover I must protect our stores from hogs and rats. I turned over in my mind a thousand conjectures and slept little.

"Next morning I slung what I could of our stores from our jury-ridge-pole, out of the reach of hogs and rats, made sure that the remaining whale-boat would not get adrift, prepared the remaining dory with cocoanuts, biscuits, a keg of water, liquor, some miscellaneous stores, medicine, ammunition, repeating rifle, my glass and my compass. I carried two revolvers. I knew by this time something was wrong and I rowed warily across the placid lagoon toward the pink crag.

"As I approached it I could not but remark the peacefulness and beauty of my surroundings. The sky was deep tropic blue, the sun not an hour high, the wind a mild breeze, hardly more than rippling the lagoon, my horizon was all the tops of palms on the atoll except the one glimpse of white surf on the reef beyond the channel where we had entered.

"I rowed slowly, for the dory was heavy, and kept looking over my shoulder.

"The crag rose sheer out of deep water. It might have been granite, but I could not tell what sort of stone it was. It was very pink and nothing grew on it, not anything whatever. It was just sheer naked rock. As I rounded it I could see the flattish island beyond. There was not a tree on it and I could see nothing but the even beach of it rising some six or eight feet above high water mark. Nothing was visible beyond the crest of the beach. I knew our men had meant to land on it and I stopped and considered. Then I rowed round the base of the crag. Facing the flat islet was a sort of a shelf of the pink rock, half submerged, half out of the water, sloping very gently and just the place to make a landing. I rowed the dory carefully till its bottom grated on the flat top of this shelf, the bow in say a foot of water, the stern over water may be sixty fathom deep, for I could see no bottom to its limpid blue. I stepped out and drew the dory well up on the shelf. Then I essayed to climb the crag. I succeeded at once, but it was none too easy and I had no leisure to look behind me till I reached the top. Once on the fairly flat top, which might have been thirty feet across, I turned and looked over the islet.

"Then I sat down heavily and took out my flask. I took a big drink, shut my eyes, said a

prayer, I think, and looked again. I saw just what I had seen before.

"There was about a ship's-length of water between the crag and the islet, which might have been four ships-lengths across and was nearly circular. All round it was a white beach of clean coral-sand sloping evenly and rising perhaps ten feet at most above high-water mark. The rest of the island was a meadow, nearly level but cupping ever so little from the crest of the beach. It was covered with short, soft-looking grass, of a bright pale green, a green like that of an English lawn in Spring. In the center of the island and of the meadow was an oval slab of pinkish stone, the same stone, apparently, as made up the crag on which I sat. On it were two shapes of living creatures, but shapes which I rubbed my eyes to look at. Midway between the slab and the crest of the beach a long windrow heap of something white swept in a circle round the slab, maybe ten fathom from it. I did not surely make out what the windrow was composed of until I took my glasses to it.

"But it needed no glass to see our men, all nineteen of them, all sitting, some just inside the white windrow, some just outside of it, some on it or in it. Their faces were turned to the slab.

"I took my glass out of my pocket, trembling so I could hardly adjust it. With it I saw clearly,

the windrow as I had guessed, the shapes on the slab as I had seemed to see them with my unaided eyes.

"The windrow was all of human bones. I could see them clearly through the glass.

"The two creatures on the slab were shaped like full-bodied young women. Except their faces nothing of their flesh was visible. They were clad in something close-fitting, and pearly gray, which clung to every part of them, and revealed every curve of their forms; as it were a tight-fitting envelopment of fine mole-skin or chinchilla. But it shimmered in the sunlight more like eider-down.

"And their hair! I rubbed my eyes. I took out my handkerchief and rubbed the lenses of my glasses. I looked again. I saw as before. Their hair was abundant, and fell in curly waves to their hips. But it seemed a deep dark blue, or a dull intense shot-green or both at once or both together. I could not see it any other way.

"And their faces!

"Their faces were those of white women, of European women, of young handsome gentlewomen.

"One of them lay on the slab half on her side, her knees a little drawn up, her head on one bent arm, her face toward me, as if asleep. The other sat, supporting herself by one straight arm. Her

mouth was open, her lips moved, her face was the face of a woman singing. I dared not look any more. It was so real and so incredible.

"I scanned our men through my glass. I could see their shoulders heave as they breathed, otherwise not one moved a muscle, while I looked him.

"I shut my glass and put it in my pocket. I shouted. Not a man turned. I fixed my gaze so as to observe the whole group at once. I shouted again. Not a man moved. I took my revolver from its holster and fired in the air. Not a man turned.

"Then I started to clamber down the crag. I had to turn my back on the islet, regard the far horizon, fix my gaze on the camp, discernible by the white patch, where the white sails were stretched over the palm trunk and try to realize the reality of things before I could gather myself together to climb down.

"I made it, but I nearly lost my hold a dozen times.

"I pushed off the dory, rowed to the islet, and beached the dory between the other and the whale-boat. Both were half adrift and I hauled them up as well as I could.

"Then I went up the beach. When I came to its crest and saw the backs of our men I shouted again. Not a man turned his head. I approached

them, their faces were set immovably towards the rock and the two appearances on it.

"Peddicord was nearest to me, the windrow of bones in front of him was not wide nor high. He stared across it. I caught him by the shoulders and shook him, then he did turn his head and look up at me, just a glance, the glance of a peevish, protesting child disturbed at some absorbing play, an unintelligent vacuous glance, unrecognizing and uncomprehending.

"The glance startled me enough, for Peddicord had been a hard-headed, sensible Yankee. But the change in his face, since yesterday, startled me more. Of a sudden I realized that Peddicord, Ryan, Mullen and Frenchy had been without food or water since I last saw them, that they had been just where I found them since soon after they left me, had been exposed the day before to a tropical sun for some six hours, had sat all night also without moving, or sleeping. At the same instant I realized that the rest had been in the same state for some hours longer, some hours of a burning, morning tropical sun. The realization of it lost my head completely. I ran from man to man, I yelled, I pulled them, I struck them.

"Not one struck back, or answered, or looked at me twice. Each shook me off impatiently and, relapsed into his intent posture, even Obrink.

"Obrink, it is true, partially opened his mouth, as if to speak.

"I saw his tongue!

"I ran to the boat, took a handful of ship-biscuit and a pan of water, with these I returned to the men.

"Not one would notice the biscuit, not one showed any interest in the water, not one looked at it as if he saw it when I held it before his face, not one tried to drink, not one would drink when I tried to force it on him.

"I emptied my flask into the water, with that I went from man to man. Not even the smell of the whisky roused them. Each pushed the pan from before his face, each resisted me, each shoved me away.

"I went back to the boat, filled a tin cup with raw whisky and went the round with that. Not one would regard it, much less swallow it.

"Then I myself turned to the slab of stone.

"There sat the sirens. Well I recognized now what they were. Both were awake now and both singing. What I had seen through the glass was visible more clearly, more intelligibly. They were indeed shaped like young, healthy women; like well-matured Caucasian women. They were covered all over with close, soft plumage, like the breast of a dove, colored like the breast of a dove, a pale, delicate, iridescent, pinkish gray.

As a woman's long hair might trail to her hips, there trailed from their heads a mass of long, dark strands. Imagine single strands of ostrich feathers, a yard long or more, curling spirally or at random, colored the deep, shot, blue-green of the eye of a peacock feather, or of a gamecock's shackles. That was what grew from their heads, as I seemed to see it.

"I stepped over the windrow of bones. Some were mere dust; some leached gray by sun, wind and rain; some white. Skulls were there, five or six I saw in as many yards of the windrow near me and more beyond. In some places the windrow was ten feet wide and three feet deep in the middle. It was made up of the skeletons of hundreds of thousands of victims.

"I took out my other revolver, spun the cylinder, and strode toward the slab.

"Forty feet from it I stopped. I was determined to abolish the superhuman monsters. I was resolute. I was not afraid. But I stopped. Again and again I strove to go nearer, I braced my resolutions. I tried to go nearer. I could not.

"Then I tried to go sideways. I was able to step. I made the circuit of the slab, some forty feet from it. Nearer I could not go. It was as if a glass wall were between me and the sirens.

"Standing at my distance, once I found I could

go no nearer, I essayed to aim my revolver at them. My muscles, my nerves refused to obey me. I tried in various ways. I might have been paralyzed. I tried other movements, I was capable of any other movement. But aim at them I could not.

"I regarded them. Especially their faces, their wonderful faces.

"Their investiture of opalescent plumelets covered their throats. Between it and the deep, dark chevelure above, their faces showed ivory-smooth, delicately tinted. I could see their ears too, shell-like ears, entirely human in form, peeping from under the glossy shade of their miraculous tresses.

"They were as like each other as any twin sisters.

"Their faces were oval, their features small, clean-cut, regular and shapely, their foreheads were wide and low, their brows were separate, arched, penciled and definite, not of hair, but of tiny feathers, of gold-shot, black, blue-green, like the color of their ringlets, but far darker. I took out my binoculars and conned their brows. Their eyes were dark blue-gray, bright and young, their noses were small and straight, low between the eyes, neither wide nor narrow, and with molded nostrils, rolled and fine. Their upper lips were short, both lips crimson red and

curved about their small mouths, their teeth were very white, their chins round and babyish. They were beautiful and the act of singing did not mar their beauty. Their mouths did not strain open, but their lips parted easily into an opening. Their throats seemed to ripple like the throat of a trilling canary-bird. They sang with zest and the zest made them all the more beautiful. But it was not so much their beauty that impressed me, it was the nobility of their faces.

“Some years before I had been an officer on the private steam-yacht of a very wealthy nobleman. He was of a family fanatically devoted to the church of Rome and all its interests. Some Austrian nuns, of an order made up exclusively of noblewomen, were about to go to Rome for an audience with the Pope. My employer placed his yacht at their disposal and we took them on at Trieste. They several times sat on deck during the voyage and the return. I watched them as much as I could, for I never had seen such human faces, and I had seen many sorts. Their faces seemed to tell of a long lineage of men all brave and honorable, women gentle and pure. There was not a trace on their faces of any sort of evil in themselves or in anything that had ever really influenced them. They were really saintly faces, the faces of ideal nuns.

“Well, the sirens’ faces were like that, only

more ineffably perfect. There was no guile or cruelty in them, no delight in the exercise of their power, no consciousness of it, no consciousness of my proximity, or of the spell-bound men, or of the uncountable skeletons of their myriad victims. Their faces expressed but one emotion: utter absorption in the ecstasy of singing, the infinite preoccupation of artists in their art.

"I walked all round them, gazing now with all my eyes, now through my short-focused glass. Their coat of feathers was as if very short and close like seal-skin fur and covered them entirely from the throat down, to the ends of their fingers and the soles of their feet. They did not move except to sit up to sing or lie down to sleep. Sometimes both sang together, sometimes alternately, but if one slept the other sang on and on without ceasing.

"I of course could not hear their music, but the mere sight of them fascinated me so that I forgot my weariness from anxiety and loss of sleep, forgot the vertical sun, forgot food and drink, forgot my shipmates, forgot everything.

"But as I could not hear this state was transitory. I began to look elsewhere than at the sirens. My gaze turned again upon the men. Again I made futile efforts to reach the sirens, to shoot at them, to aim at them. I could not.

"I returned to my dory and drank a great deal

of water. I ate a ship-biscuit or two. I then made the round of the men, and tried on each food, water and spirits. They were oblivious to everything except the longing to listen, to listen, to listen.

"I walked round the windrow of bones. With the skulls and collapsing rib-arches I found leather boots, several leather belts, case-knives, kreeses, guns of various patterns, pistols, watches, gold and jeweled finger rings and coins, many coins, copper, silver and gold. The grass was short, not three inches deep and the earth under it smooth as a rolled lawn.

"The bones were of various ages, but all old, except two skeletons, entire, side by side, just beyond the windrow at the portion opposite where the men sat. There was long fine golden hair on one skull. Women too!

"I went back to the dory, rowed to the camp, shot a hog, roasted it, wrapped the steaming meat in fresh leaves and rowed back to the islet. It was not far from sunset.

"Not a man heeded the savory meat, still warm. They just sat and gazed and listened.

"I was free of the spell. I could do them no good by staying. I rowed back to camp before sunset and slept, yes I slept all night long.

"The sun woke me. I shot and cooked another

hog, took every bit of rope or marline I could find and rowed back to the islet.

"You are to understand that the men had by then been more than forty hours, all of them, without moving or swallowing anything. If I was to save any it must be done quickly.

"I found them as they had been, but with an appalling change in themselves. The day before they had been uncannily unaware of their sufferings, to-day they were hideously conscious of them.

"Once I had a pet terrier, a neat, trim, intelligent, little beast. He ran under a moving train and had both his hind legs cut off. He dragged himself to me, and the appealing gaze of his eyes expressed at once his inability to comprehend what had happened to him, his bewilderment at pain, the first really excruciating pain he had ever known in all his little life, and his dumb wonder that I did not help him, that it could be possible he could be with me and his trouble continue.

"Once I had the misfortune to see a lovely child, a beautiful little girl, not six years old, frightfully burned. Her look haunted me with the like incomprehension of what had befallen her, the like incredulity at the violence of her suffering, the like amazement at our failure to relieve her.

"Well, out of the staring, blood-shot eyes of those bewitched men I saw the same look of helpless wonderment and mute appeal.

"Strange, but I never thought of knocking them senseless. I had an idea of tying them one by one, carrying or dragging them to the dory and ferrying my captives to camp.

"I began on Frenchy, he was nearest the boat and smallest.

"He fought like a demon. After all that sleeplessness and fasting he was stronger than I. Our tussle wore me out, but moved him not at all.

"I tried them with the warm juicy, savory pork. They paid no heed to it and pushed me away. I tried them with biscuit, water and liquor. Not one heeded. I tried Obrink particularly. Again he opened his lips. His tongue was black, hard, and swelled till it filled his mouth.

"Then I lost count of time, of what I did, of what happened. I do not know whether it was on that day or the next that the first man died. He was Jack Register, a New York wharf-rat. The next died a few hours later, a Philadelphia seaman he was, named Tom Smith.

"They putrefied with a rapidity surpassing anything I ever saw, even in a horse dropped dead of over-driving.

"The rest sat there by the carrion of their

comrades, rocking with weakness, crazed by sleeplessness, racked by tortures inexpressible, the gray of death deepening on their faces, listening, listening, listening.

"As I said, I had lost consciousness of time. I do not know how many days Obrink lived, and he was the last to die. I do not know how long it was after his death before I came to myself.

"I made one last effort to put an end to the enchantresses. The same spell possessed me. I could not aim, much less pull trigger; I could not approach nearer than before.

"When I was myself I made haste to leave the accursed isle. I made ready the second whale-boat with all the best stores she could carry and spare sails. I stepped the mast and steered across the lagoon, for the wind was southerly and there was a wider channel at the north of the atoll.

"As I passed the islet, I could see nothing but the white sand beach that ringed it. For all my horror I could not resist landing once more for one last look.

"Under the afternoon sun I saw the green meadow, the white curve of bones, the rotting corpses, the pink slab, the feathered sirens, their sweet serene faces uplifted, singing on in a rapt trance.

"I took but one look. I fled. The whale-boat

passed the outlet of the lagoon. North by east I steered.

"Parts of the Indian Ocean are almost free of storms. The atoll was apparently in one of those parts. I soon passed out of it. Three storms blew me about, I lost my dead-reckoning, I lost count of the days. Between the storms I lashed the tiller amidships, double-reefed the sail and slept as I needed sleep. Through the storms I bailed furiously, the whale-boat riding at a sea-anchor of oars and sails. I had been at sea alone for all of twenty-one days when I was rescued, not three hundred miles from Ceylon, by a tramp steamer out of Colombo bound for Adelaide."

Here he broke off, stood up and for the rest of the watch maintained his sentry-go by the break of the poop.

Next day we towed into the harbor of Rio de Janeiro, then still the capital of an Empire, and mildly enthusiastic for Dom Pedro. I hastened to go ashore. When my boat was ready the deaf mate was forward, superintending the sealing of the hatches.

After some days of discomfort at the Hotel des Etrangers and of worse at Young's Hotel I found a harborage with five jolly bachelors housekeeping in a delightful villa up on Rua dos

Jonquillos on Santa Theresa. The *Nipsic* was in the harbor and I thought I knew a lieutenant on her and went off one day to visit her. After my visit my boatman landed me at the Red Steps. As I trod up the steps a man came down. He was English all over, irreproachably shod, trousered, coated, gloved, hatted and monocled. Behind him two porters carried big, new portmanteaux. I recognized the man whom I had known as John Wilson of Liverpool, second mate of the *Medorus*, the man who had seen the Sirens.

Not only did I recognize him, but he recognized me. He gave me no far off British stare. His eyes lit, even the monocled eye. He held out his hand.

"I am going home," he said, nodding toward a steamer at anchor, "I am glad we met. I enjoyed our talks. Perhaps we may meet again."

He shook hands without any more words. I stood at the top of the steps and watched his boat put off, watched it as it receded. As I watched a bit of paper on a lower step caught my eye. I went down and picked it up. It was an empty envelope, with an English stamp and postmark, addressed:

GEOFFREY CECIL, ESQ.,
c.o. SWANWICK & Co.,
54 Rua de Alfandega,
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

I looked after the distant boat, I could barely make him out as he sat in the stern. I never saw him again.

Naturally I asked every Englishman I ever met if he had ever heard of a deaf man named Geoffrey Cecil. For more than ten years I elicited no response. Then at lunch, in the Hotel Victoria at Interlaken, I happened to be seated opposite a stout, elderly Briton. He perceived that I was an American and became affable and agreeable. I never saw him after that lunch and never learned his name. But through our brief meal together we conversed freely.

At a suitable opportunity I put my usual query.

"Geoffrey Cecil?" he said. "Deaf Geoffrey Cecil? Of course I know of him. Knew him too. He was or is Earl of Aldersmere."

"Was or is?" I queried.

"It was this way," my interlocutor explained. "The ninth Earl of Aldersmere had three sons. All predeceased him and each left one son. Geoffrey was the heir. He had wanted to go into the Navy, but his deafness cut him off from that. When he quarreled with his father he naturally ran away to sea. Track of him was lost. He was supposed dead. That was years before his father's death. When his father died

nothing had been heard of him for ten years. But when his grandfather died and his cousin Roger supposed himself Earl, some firm of solicitors interposed, claiming that Geoffrey was alive. That was in 1885. It was a full six months before Geoffrey turned up. Roger was no end disappointed. Geoffrey paid no attention to anything but buying or chartering a steam-yacht. She sailed as soon as possible, passed the canal, touched at Aden, and has never been heard of since. That was nine years ago."

"Is Roger Cecil alive?" I asked.

"Very much alive," affirmed my informant.

"You may tell him from me," I declared, "that he is now the Eleventh Earl of Aldersmere."

IARBAS

IARBAS

WHEN through the fire nothing remained discernible, when peering and gazing they saw only flame within flame, two of her women gently drew Anna away from the pyre. She let herself be conducted across the courtyard and up the easy stone stair to the first gallery. There, hanging over the polished marble railing of the balustrade, her head leaned against one of the columns, Anna watched the burning pyre. It blazed on, even larger and fiercer, for a string of porters and workmen carrying logs or faggots, filed into the court. Each threw his burden upon the pyre and passed out by another door. Others followed in like manner, and, after a time, the same men returned again with fresh burdens.

From her place by the pillar of the gallery Anna refused to stir.

Several of the women carried in a broad, cushioned couch, placed it silently behind their lady and gently induced her to recline upon it. So reclining she leaned her bosom against the balustrade, her arms upon its rail, her head upon her arms. There she fell asleep.

All night, the slaves in single file carried fuel to keep up the blaze. When the first dawn-light appeared in the sky overhead and the pigeons began to coo upon the red-tiled roofs of the palace, Anna awakened and gave a soft-voiced order. The fuel-carriers ceased to file into the court, the last of them went their way and the pyre was left to burn out of itself.

Watching its fury slacken and its blaze abate Anna, partly from innate docility, partly from dazed indifference, passively permitted her maids to bathe her face and hands, to bind up her hair, somewhat to arrange her dress. She even compliantly swallowed some mouthfuls of the bread moistened with hot spiced wine which they urged upon her. She allowed them to unclasp her nerveless fingers from the tear-soaked square of linen they clutched, to place in them another.

Tactfully they withdrew some little distance and left her absorbed in her grief, oblivious of all other things, droopingly half-supported against the balustrade and pillar, watching the pyre sink into a bed of glowing coals. She stared down at it, weeping softly, now and then sobbing, and once and again dabbing at her eyes with the square of linen she held crumpled in her hand. The women slaves, huddled out of sight under the lower arcade, kept up a monotonous shrill wailing, a weird, droning noise

which had become less and less insistent as the hours passed. Through it Anna was aware of a different sound.

She heard the clank and tinkle of jangling armor and glanced across the court. Between two pillars of the lower colonnade in front of the main central doorway stood Iarbas. The scarlet plume of his helmet-crest nodded still and waved as his crimson cloak fluttered and undulated behind him with the impetus of his checked haste; the dawn-light and the fire-light glittered and gleamed on the brow-piece of his helmet, on the gilded links of his chain corselet, on the burnished scales of his broad kilt-straps, and shone on the great round shield and the broad polished points of the twin spears his armor-bearer carried behind him. His eyes were bright in his big swarthy face, and roved about the court gazing at the huddled crowd of servants and menials under the side-colonnades, at the dying glow of the sinking pyre, at Anna and her attendants above. He waved his hand backward with a single imperious gesture and strode across the court. Anna heard his tread on the tessellated floor of the gallery and looked around at him, half sitting up, but still limply leaning upon the balustrade, her head against the pillar. She said nothing.

Weeping did not disfigure Anna. Her pale

gold hair rippled ever so little over her temples, her pale blue eyes gazed from unreddened lids, her pale pinkish cheeks were not streaky with her hours of tears, her mild oval face was pretty as it had been throughout her past, whether she had been anxious and worried or happy and gay. Iarbas looked her over from the grass-green sandal-straps across the small arched instep showing under the embroidered hem of her sea-green gown to the jade brooch at her shoulder and the apple-green ribbon which confined her hair. He found himself astonished at her comeliness, he had never noted her looks before.

She gazed at him steadily, mute.

"I am a day too late," he said.

She turned from him, buried her face upon her crossed arms, and burst into a passion of sobs.

He stood behind her awkwardly, ill at ease and silent, until her paroxysm of grief quieted. Exhibition of emotion was no habit of Anna's. She had been a matter-of-fact child, whose hurts made but a passing impression upon her, a quiet girl, the reverse of high-strung; and a housewifely young woman. Embroidery had been her only activity, superintendence of the maids at their spinning and weaving, or overseeing of the cookery and service her chief occupations. She had never been enthusiastic, or fervid, but always very much the reverse. When King Belus

of Tyre died Anna's wailing had been low-voiced, less noisy than that of any of his other daughters. At her mother's burial her grief had been tacit and suppressed. Amid the tumult and alarm following the murder of Sychaeus, Anna had wept for her beloved brother-in-law decorously and briefly. So now the violence of her sobbing soon abated, her soft weeping too ceased before long. She sat up again and again looked at him.

"I am a day too late," he repeated.

"My sister is beyond any reach or any revenge of yours," she said in her even, unemotional tones, her gaze contemptuous. "All that remains of poor Dido is ashes under the coals of her pyre there."

"I had no thought of revenge on her or of violence to her or her wishes," Iarbas disclaimed.

Anna regarded him unwinkingly. Her weeping had entirely stopped, her eyes were dry, as her cheeks. Her many bereavements, her experiences amid assassinations, plots, revolt, exile and colonization had changed her not at all. Her grief for the loss of her last and best loved sister was genuine and keen, but its manifestations were evanescent. Her gaze was almost as placid as her habitual serene look.

"For what are you a day too late?" she asked.

Anna was not argumentative. She never

spoke with heat. Her girlish companions had never been able to elicit from her any warmth of utterance except when she enunciated to them her favorite aphorism that a woman should not find fault with her husband, that any woman should be glad to be married and that the sort of man made little difference. Even this pet doctrine she had maintained but tepidly. So also to Iarbas she spoke mildly.

As he stood mute she repeated, tonelessly.

"For what then are you a day too late?"

"To avenge her and myself," Iarbas answered fiercely. "To reach him, to kill him."

"Aeneas?" Anna exclaimed. "You thought you could? Why did you think you could?"

"You must have known, Dido must have known, anybody must have known, that I had spies in Carthage," Iarbas began apologetically. "I have had many and I have been well served. They learnt his habits and informed me. The man was very thoughtless, very heedless or very reckless."

"Aeneas!" Anna interjected, "call it entirely self-reliant."

"So be it, if you please," Iarbas consented. "Call it what you choose. At any rate, according to the reports I received, he never varied his day's routine.

"About an hour after sunrise Achates drove

his chariot into the palace forecourt and waited for him. When he came out he was driven straight to the arsenal. There he inspected the forges, sometimes the storerooms, always the shipyards and docks. When he again mounted his chariot they drove out by the Cothon gate and along the beach past his ships and the three guard-camps, then they wheeled to the left and drove inland to the south side of the Hippodrome. On foot and alone he went the rounds of that, inspecting the derricks and stone-cutting, climbed alone to the theater, noted the masons there and talked with the architects and overseers. On the north side of that he regained his chariot which Achates had driven round by the quarry road. From there they drove along outside the walls to the Byrsa gate, stopping at each tower where rebuilding or enlarging was in progress.

"Then instead of coming in by the Byrsa gate Achates drove him westward along the cattle track past the foot of Magar hill. They always drove alone and followed the cattle track up the slope and into the wooded depression between the two crests of Magar hill and along through the gully to the north side."

"Yes," Anna ruminatingly interjected. "He told me. He said it reminded him of the glens of Ida."

"In that ravine," Iarbas went on, "they were out of sight and sound of the city. Every day he passed there at the same time, unattended except by Achates. After traversing the hollow they turned east again, skirted Magar hill on the north and reentered the city by the Magar gate."

"You meant to ambush him in the gorge," Anna said quietly. "How many men did you expect to have with you?"

"A hundred," Iarbas replied.

"Fifty to one," Anna commented. "Surely you brought more than a hundred?"

"I gathered twenty thousand spearmen before I set out," Iarbas told her, "but I intended only a hundred for the ambush."

"When did you set out?" Anna queried settling herself against the balustrade and pillar.

"We left Usinaz a month ago to-day," Iarbas answered, "but we rode slowly, foresaw no need for haste. We crossed the Bagra das high up and camped this side of Zama. There we stayed several days, six or eight I think, resting the camels and horses, while I compared reports. We were still there four days ago. Three days ago we broke camp at dawn. I meant to catch him early yesterday morning. Runners came to me early with the news of the mustering of the Trojans, of their leaving the city, of the launch of the fleet; but as my forces were camped well

back of the dunes and I was on lesser Magar with my guards only, I could not strike in time to forestall their sailing or to prevent it. A messenger during the night had brought word that the day before Aeneas had returned on foot through the Hippodrome, sent a runner around for his chariot, spent most of the morning on the beach and reentered the city by the Cothon gate. But I had paid no attention to the report, thinking that even if he broke his routine that one day he would resume it the next as he had done once or twice before when something held or deflected him from his habitual round. So I missed my chance."

"How did you approach so near?" Anna queried, "without our getting any warning?"

"All the natives are with me heart and soul," Iarbas replied simply. "Many of your citizens are for me, they informed me at once of everything. Word of your poor sister's end was brought me before dusk. I had made my arrangements and did not change them. I assigned one division to Garamas to enter the Magar gate, one to Maurusus for the Cothon gate, and led my own column to the Byrsa gate. They were all opened for us about midnight. There has been no fighting, not a man killed. My men are in possession of all the gates and towers, of the walls, docks and arsenal, of the market, the

streets and the citadel. Bitias is under guard in his own house scared and submissive."

"You have done well," Anna declared.

"I have indeed," Iarbas boasted, "Carthage is in my hands. I have been completely successful."

"You prayed to Jupiter to help you before you left Usinaz, I suppose," Anna remarked.

"I sacrificed a hundred white bulls," Iarbas informed her, "all two-year-olds, every one perfect. I was sure of Jupiter's favor."

"He has indeed protected you," Anna said with her nearest approach to a sneer. "You did not meet Aeneas in Magar gorge."

"What do you mean?" Iarbas exclaimed.

"I mean," said Anna, sitting up haughtily, her eyes as near brightness as they were capable of, "that had you met Aeneas in Magar gorge it would have been your last hour. You would have seen a lion's rush, an eagle's swoop, his spear point would have struck you wherever he aimed and that would have been the end of you."

"You appraise me too low," the royal Moor snarled, nettled.

"I appraise you," spoke Anna placidly, "the most redoubtable champion in all Africa, but no match for Aeneas of Troy."

"I should have had my best hundred guards with me," Iarbas reminded her.

"Aeneas," Anna made answer, "without bow or arrows, with javelins only, killed seven antelopes out of one herd the day he landed in Africa. He is no sluggish spearman. He might have killed twenty of your guards, he might have needed to kill only ten. But before him your hundred ruffians would have scattered like a handful of children. You and they would have had no chance against him."

"You talk," Iarbas exclaimed, "as if you admired the Phrygian pirate."

"Never you dare to miscall Aeneas to me," Anna blazed. "You are master of Carthage if you please, but not of me. Go, or promise to speak respectfully to me and of him."

Mighty of bulk Iarbas stood, towering in height, huge of girth, brawny, clad in mail, clothed as well in the elation of his triumph. Anna was sitting half recumbent, small, slight, soft-voiced and almost expressionless, yet before her gaze the eyes of the big warrior sought the floor.

"I promise," he said. "You admire him indeed."

"Naturally," Anna replied, "he is the most admirable man alive, the most admirable man who ever lived."

"Can you say that," the tall prince exclaimed, "when your poor sister's ashes are not yet cold

in her pyre, the day after her wretched death, the day after his heartless desertion of her?"

"No man," spoke Anna steadily, "was ever further from being heartless than Aeneas was and is, no man ever tore himself more unwillingly and reluctantly from the woman he loved."

"There must have been some blundering in the reports that reached me then," Iarbas declared, bewilderedly, "all agreed that from the time he took up his abode in the palace until day before yesterday he lived as her husband and as king of Carthage, that day before yesterday about noon the Trojans began leaving the city by the Cothon gate, that before sunset the fleet was launched and riding at anchor. Two of my messengers told of Dido's begging him to stay, one told of you yourself going out of the Cothon gate to plead with him when the whole fleet was already afloat. All the messengers uniformly reported that Dido's suicide was caused by his desertion."

"Before you left Usinaz," Anna began evenly, "you burnt a hecatomb to Jupiter, did you not?"

"I did," Iarbas agreed.

"The omens were favorable mostly, were they not?" Anna inquired.

"Not mostly," Iarbas replied, "all were favorable and very favorable. Not only none of the bullocks stamped, but not one so much as fidgeted

or bellowed. As mild and meek a hundred bulls as those never stood about one altar. Every liver was perfect, not one with a shrunken lobe, not one with a white spot, not a streak on any, not a discoloration. So with the hearts and the rest. No man ever had a more unmistakable pledge of his God's approval, no man ever had a more positive authorization from Heaven."

"Suppose some of the omens had been bad?" Anna suggested.

"Anyone is used to that," Iarbas shrugged.

"Suppose they all had been bad," Anna continued.

"I should have sacrificed another hecatomb," Iarbas reflected, "until they came out right."

"Suppose they did not come out right?" Anna pursued. "Suppose they were all bad and continued to be bad. Suppose you had sacrificed a thousand bulls and not one of them but was as bad as possible in every respect?"

"Too improbable to suppose," Iarbas muttered. "That would be impossible."

"Just suppose it," Anna insisted. "Say it had happened so, what would you have done?"

"I should have stayed in Usinaz, certainly," Iarbas ruminated. "Likely I should have disbanded my men too and let them go home. If such a thing could happen and if it had happened to me I should have been too scared to stir out,

not merely for an expedition, but even for a hunt or a ride."

"You would have taken it as a plain message from Jupiter imperatively prohibiting you from your purpose?" Anna inquired, "would you not? You would have left Aeneas undisturbed and Dido in his possession no matter how you raged and fumed?"

"I certainly should," Iarbas admitted, "if such an unthinkable accumulation of bad omens had occurred."

"Suppose," Anna resumed, "that before your first sacrifice Mercury himself had appeared to you, spoken to you as plainly as I am speaking to you and told you from Jupiter to give up your purpose and remain quietly at home, would you have obeyed?"

"I should certainly have obeyed," Iarbas declared fervently, "if such a plain warning had come to me from on high."

"You think yourself a scrupulous man," Anna said, "but Aeneas is far more scrupulous than you. Day before yesterday he left the palace on his rounds punctually as usual, as you know; as you know, he returned from the Hippodrome to the beach, spent most of the day there and re-entered the city by the Cothon gate about mid-afternoon. As he came in by the men's fore-court Dido met him. She had heard that the

Trojans quartered in the city were leaving by the Cothon gate. He bade her a rather bungling, clumsy and tongue-tied farewell. I watched them from the rear gallery and he looked when he came in like a man who had seen a ghost and when he went out like a man going to his death. Dido made me go after him to the beach and plead with him. That was about dusk.

"He stood there with his back to the sea, looking down at me and listening to me with his grave courtesy.

"‘I was at the worst of my misfortunes,’ he said, ‘with only seven ships left and those no longer seaworthy, their crews worn out, all of us in despair, short of food, clothing, supplies and weapons. I was a beggared outcast on an unknown coast. She welcomed me. She did everything for us. She rescued my scattered people and reunited us all. She was the very goddess of generosity and kindness. Apart from all that she is the very handsomest woman I ever saw, after Helen of Tiryns, and gentler and sweeter than any woman ever was. More than that she loves me. And above all, I love her. Yet I must go. My hard fate drives me and tears us apart. I must follow my bitter destiny.’

"Won't your destiny wait until spring?" I asked him. "Does your destiny call any louder than yesterday or the day you landed here?" I

did not know what he had said to Dido or she to him and I was angry and hurt all through.

"He looked at me steadily.

"*'Anna,'* he said, *'my destiny might have called me forever and I should not have listened. Jove has called me and in no uncertain tones.*

"*'I was sauntering up the cut-off path from the Hippodrome to the theater. I was happy and humming an air, the air Dido made the morning of our first hunt. I had passed between the two pomegranate trees and up the steps to that shoulder of rock where you can look over the tops of the pomegranates and see the Hippodrome. I stood there awhile looking down at it, Then I turned to go up the crooked steps.*

"*'I heard a whirring in the air like the noise of a flock of doves swooping down to alight. I looked back and up. There was Mercury, as plain as I see you, not five yards from me, almost on a level with me, poised in the air over the pomegranate trees.*

"*'His attitude was much that of a spear-thrower, all balanced, leaning forward over the left leg, left knee bent, left heel raised, left arm hanging free, right leg straightened and trailing, feet well apart. But his right arm was not raised, it was extended toward me and carried his caduceus. The snakes around the rod squirmed and coiled and recoiled as I looked.*

"The wings on his cap and bracelets and sandals made rainbow colors in the air about his ankles and wrists and temples, like the iridescent shimmer of a dragonfly's wings when it hovers over a pool. I could hear the whiz of their buzzing motion.

"He alighted not two yards from me on the edge of the cliff.

"You have seen me more than once at Troy," he said, "though not so clearly nor for so long; you know who I am and whose messenger I am. His message is but one word: 'SAIL!' That means sail at once. You have no right to rest or ease or comfort. It was never right for you to linger one needless day anywhere. Still less was it right for you to form ties in any land except the land appointed for you and indicated to you. Least of all is it right for you to assist another race to strengthen a colony. You know all this. Jove reminds you through me. Heed him. ACT! SAIL!

"Like a bird from a flower he whirled upward, flashed in the sunlight and was gone.

"Do you wonder I obey? Can I, could I yield to any appeal from you or her or my own heart? Is there any use in saying anything?

"I turned away to my litter and my bearers carried me back to the palace, but I remember nothing of the way home. He was right."

"You sympathize with him!" Iarbas blurted out indignantly. "You take his side."

"Who could but sympathize with him?" Anna maintained. "Really he never knew any mother except his foster nurse Caieta. Since before he was half grown his father was a cripple. From boyhood he never could have his own way about anything. It was duty, duty perpetually. He always spoke beautifully of Creusa, but it was plain to be seen he loved her because he had married her rather than had married her because he loved her. It was plain that he had married her because his father and his cousins, old Sultan Priam and Prince Hector and the rest thought the marriage advisable for state reasons. Then they all suffered ten years of unremitting siege. Then he had the horror of Creusa's death to remember and the haunting self-reproach that he had not saved her, as he had saved his father and son from that appalling whirlpool of terrors, the awful night of the sack of Troy. Then in exile he endured years of toils, misfortunes and baffled wanderings.

"And then he had the only taste of happiness in all his life. He was happy for the first time, living with a woman he loved, who loved him, who was fit to be his companion, living as king of a strong prosperous city, as the chief of an adoring, appreciative people. And no sooner had

he begun to relish it than he must tear himself away from it, give it all up, leave it behind and go out to more wanderings and toils and sufferings and disappointments and he did not blench. He went. He suffered more than Dido, though he talked less. But he never thought of giving up, he accepted his fate as it came to him and did his duty as he found it. Not even his worst enemy could fail to sympathize with him. Even you cannot help sympathizing with him. You know in your heart you cannot but approve of his unhesitating obedience to Jove's behest, you cannot but admire the strength of will equal to such magnificent self-control, you cannot but sympathize with his heartache and regrets."

"Nothing," said Iarbas, "can alter the fact that Dido killed herself because Aeneas left her. Nothing can alter the fact that he is under the curse she laid upon him before she died. The fact of the curse by itself should cut him off from any reminiscent sympathy in your heart, from even the thought of it."

Anna bowed her face into her covering hands and began to weep softly.

The warrior king stood staring down at her helpless and uneasy.

Presently she took her hands from her face, dried her eyes and looked up at him.

"Oh," she wailed, "if prayer or sacrifice or

any expiation or incantation might lift that curse! If only it lay within my power to save him from that curse! He goes weighted with it to some dreadful doom and he never deserved it or anything but blessings and good wishes."

"You make me angry," Iarbas growled. "Deserve or no deserve she killed herself because of him. You have no proper clan-spirit or family spirit. You should think only of her suicide."

"I do not blame him for her death," Anna declared. "I blame her. He suffered as much as she at their parting, for he loved her as much as she loved him; more, for she was left with her established city, her sister, her loving people, countless opportunities of usefulness lay before her, countless duties called her. She thought only of her pangs of grief. She selfishly threw away all the noble activities, all the honor and respect her future might have brought her. He rose superior to his anguish, to the black threatening of the future before him, to everything except his duty. He is all admirable. Why blame him because of her weakness? I suffered more than both of them, I have not killed myself. I can bear my misery, why could not she have borne hers?"

"Your misery?" Iarbas cried resonantly.

Anna turned from him, cast her arms upon the broad top of the balustrade, hid her face

upon her arms and burst into a storm of violent sobbing.

Iarbas took a step toward her, hand outstretched as if to lay it upon her shoulder. He checked himself, drew up, stiff and straight and tall and stood immobile and mute till her outburst spent itself.

Again she dried her eyes and looked up at him. She was no less beautiful because of her weeping. He could not but notice that, as she could not but notice the harsh query in his suspicious eyes.

"What did Dido suffer?" she argued, "compared with what I suffered, with what I suffer now? She was abandoned, deserted, forlorn, but she knew even in her frenzy that he really loved her and left her reluctantly at stern duty's call. He went away from me forever without any thought of me more than he took of the sands beneath his feet as he stood there and spoke to me for the last time.

"She lost him, but she had possessed him, had seen him utterly swept away in a passion of longing for her, wholly absorbed in adoration for her. Me he had never for one instant regarded, had never thought of as desirable, never considered as anything but placid, mild, easy-going Anna, useful as a confidant, serviceable as a

bearer of tokens and gifts and messages, as a smoother-out of misunderstandings.

"She felt his caresses and knew him her own for the time, basked in months of ecstasy; I must keep a serene face and suave tongue and watch their bliss and know that I was absolutely nothing to him and give no sign. I suffered ten thousand deaths a day while their felicity endured. I did not kill them, I did not kill myself, I shall not now. Dido should not have killed herself. She would have outworn her agony in time. So shall I. I believe not in making the worst of anything, but in making the best of everything."

"Now you talk more like yourself," said Iarbas. "I have not known you since I came here this time. I thought you too staid for such vehemence, too gentle for such feelings, too contained to show it if you felt any such."

"That has always been the way since I was a baby," Anna protested. "Father called me his little pillow, because I was so plump and soft, brother Sychaeus called me 'cushion,' even Pygmalion teased me about my tranquillity. Nobody ever gave me any credit for having any feelings."

"I do," said Iarbas.

"You do not show it," Anna asserted.

"Feelings or no feelings as that may be," Iarbas pursued. "You said just now you believe in making the best of things."

"I do," Anna agreed.

"How do you expect," Iarbas inquired, "to make the best of your present circumstances?"

"I do not expect anything," Anna declared, "and I have no power to make, I can only go on existing, and pray and wait, as a woman must, for what is to come."

"You must have expected something," Iarbas insisted. "You could not help thinking."

"I was too dazed to think," Anna maintained. "If I expected anything it was that Bitias would seize the citadel as soon as he heard of Dido's death and likely enough have me strangled to ensure his control of the city. If he made no attempt at revolution or faction, Pygmalion might appear any day with an irresistible fleet convoying the transports of an overwhelming army. I saw not a ray of hope for the city or for me. Dido had capacity, and popularity and prestige, I have barely the shadow of any of the three."

"And now?" Iarbas queried.

"You are master of the city, you say," she answered. "I am in your hands."

"The logical solution," Iarbas declared, "is for you to marry me and live on as queen of Carthage."

"You hound!" Anna cried. "My sister unburied, and you talk to me of marriage!"

Iarbas stared at her amazed at her outburst.

"You said you were in my hands," he wondered.

"I expected better treatment at your hands," Anna retorted.

"I cannot imagine any better treatment," the bluff soldier king declared. "You say you loved Aeneas and show you loved him. Yet after all I offer you myself. You would be my queen."

"I had rather perish as Dido perished," Anna declared fiercely, "than be your queen."

"You said you believed in making the best of everything." Iarbas reminded her.

"There are some things," Anna told him, "out of which there is no best to make. You care nothing for me. You only want to be king of Carthage."

"I do not need you," Iarbas retorted, "to make myself king of Carthage, Carthage is mine now."

"I am not," said Anna, almost vigorously, her small head erect. "You may control Carthage, you cannot subdue me. You never cared for me, you always loved Dido. The instant she is dead you are for marrying me! I will die before I will be your queen."

"I never cared for you," Iarbas admitted, "until you faced me down and defended that Trojan p——."

He stopped, gulped and began again.

"That Trojan prince, Aeneas."

"There," Anna interjected, "that is better."

"I like your pluck, your grit," Iarbas glowed. "You held your own and showed spirit. You have no idea how beautiful you looked as you vindicated him. I fell in love with you wholly and at once. It is not so much Carthage I crave as you."

Anna looked down at her interlacing fingers.

"Am I to ride away?" Iarbas asked, softly, "and leave you to have your throat cut by Bitias and his party, or to be burned alive by Pygmalion if he comes? I love you and I want you. Apart from loving you I like you too much to leave you to such a fate, as I like you too much to force you to anything. I like you!"

"And I like you," Anna confessed. "I like your self-confidence in imagining yourself a match for Aeneas. You protested nothing when I vilified you, but I understood you never meant to use your hundred guards against him in Magar gorge. You expected them to stand and look on. You fancied yourself capable of overcoming him with no more help from them or your armor-bearer than he would have had from Achates. It was temerity, it was foolhardiness, but it was magnificent."

She gazed up at him.

"I know your decision," he said, "without your uttering any word."

His eyes met hers steadily.

"We must wait till my nine days of mourning are past," Anna demurred, yielding.

"As you please," Iarbas agreed, "but no longer than the tenth day."

"The nine days," Anna reasoned, her matter-of-factness enveloping her, "must count from the day after Dido's funeral, that cannot be until to-morrow."

"I consent," Iarbas replied, "but for no longer postponement than that."

"My women," said Anna, now wholly her matter-of-fact housewifely self, "should have changed this gay clothing of mine for proper black before now. I must call them. You can occupy the courtyard and rooms Aeneas used."

"Entirely to my mind," Iarbas agreed. "And now I must go the rounds, and see to my posts and pickets. Then I shall arrange for the details of the funeral."

Once again Anna turned from him. She looked down at the sinking coals, dulling and smouldering, their light effaced under the full brilliance of early morning. Again she hid her bowed face on her crossed arms and sobbed pitifully.

THE RIGHT MAN

THE RIGHT MAN

THE fifth ephor, as least aged, was consulted last.

"To sum up the discussion," he said, "we need an unusually capable and very desperate individual for this undertaking. After canvassing every man we can think of we decide that all those sufficiently able are insufficiently desperate and all those sufficiently desperate are insufficiently able. Confessing that we need expert outside advice as to the fitness and recklessness of men of whom we might have thought we confront the dilemma that, including the two kings, no man enough versed in these matters is to be trusted with the secrets of our policy and no trustworthy man seems likely to be able to give any valuable suggestion. Added to which last consideration it is pointed out that any man we openly call in will be besieged with every sort of device to worm from him what he has learned from us. I conclude, to secure an adventurer not yet hit upon, we must consult some man not yet named and consult him secretly."

"Here," said the second ephor sourly, "are many long words, worthy of an Athenian. A Spartan should have put that more briefly."

"We need," said the third ephor severely, "not flouts at each other nor floods of long-winded epigrammatic antitheses. We need a shining light on the situation."

"If you want to see a shining light," broke in the fourth ephor, "look at that ugly mug across the square. I have heard of Clearchos that in a fight his men called his sour phiz a shining light against the enemy. A shining light it is now surely."

"This is an undignified and frivolous interruption," exclaimed the second ephor.

"Have we discussed Clearchos?" cut in the first ephor softly, with the ghost of a smile.

"An able man enough," said the second ephor, "but too glad of the peace and of his return home."

"I should have said that he longs for more fighting," said the third ephor. "He was venturesome enough all through the war. If ever a man sought danger, he did. He throve on perils and uniformly came off safe with glory. He seemed to love risk, yet husbanded his men, laid plans with foresight and disposed his attacks with cool judgment. He often flew in the face of death."

"Yes," said the fourth ephor, "that was while Kunobates was alive."

"Gorgo's husband?" asked the fifth ephor.

"Gorgo's," replied the fourth, "while she was a wife Clearchos never smiled except at imminent annihilation. Now she is eleven months a widow and peace declared, look at him. He is no beauty, but what a grin of satisfaction, what an air of self-confidence, what a stride. He's not for war, he's all for love. No adventures for him."

"Have we discussed Clearchos as an adviser?" queried the first ephor.

"Knows all our fighters," said the second ephor.

"Totally patriotic," said the third.

"Silent as a tombstone," said the fourth.

"Never dabbles in intrigues or politics," said the fifth. "Has nothing to do with any cabal, faction or party, favors neither of the kings."

"We seem to see a light," chirped the first ephor.

Sparta was never a handsome town. Most of its houses were one-story structures of unburnt brick, white-washed, flat-roofed and, as all openings, save one door, faced the courtyards, presenting blank walls toward the narrow streets. The main square of the town was surrounded by public buildings of limestone painted white.

Of these the largest and finest was the town hall. Its lower floor was occupied by the great dining-room where the officials of the nation messed, and by its kitchen and other service quarters. Round it were the colonnaded porticoes which served as clubrooms to the elders of the outdoor-loving aristocracy. Facing the square it had a second story and in the largest room of this the ephors, for the sake of privacy, held their meetings. From the window all five gazed across the market-place at the tall, dark, angular man who strode slowly past group after group, his bronzed, ruddy face lit up by a frigid smile, his look far off, acknowledging each greeting by a stiff nod.

"Send for him," said the second ephor.

The fifth ephor unbarred the door, stepped out and called:

"Send up my boy."

A slave came in, an impudent faced middle-aged Asiatic clad only in a loin cloth and a patch-work cloak most of which dangled behind him.

"Now look me square in the eyes," said the fifth ephor, "and be ready to repeat all I say. Go back where you were before and sit down again. Stay there till no one is watching you; then stroll about until you find a slave idling. Instruct him to find Clearchos of Amyclae and

to tell him to enter the kitchen and ask for the third cook. Watch the cook and when Clearchos comes in follow him and bring him up the rear staircase without attracting attention. Now repeat all that."

The Lydian went over what had been said, was dismissed, saluted and went out.

For perhaps half an hour the ephors dealt with other matters, then Clearchos was ushered in. After the usher left the door was rebarred. Clearchos gravely saluted, without speaking any word, was offered a stool by a gesture of the first ephor, and seated himself in silence. He wore a black-felt traveling hat whose hemispherical crown fitted close to his head like a cap and whose broad brim shaded his dark face. He kept it on, as it was no part of Greek manners to remove one's hat. A voluminous red cloak, with a broad wall-of-Troy border done in black, wrapped him from his neck to his ankles. His military boots were of red leather, gilded along the edges of the soles after the fashion of Lydian and other Asiatic bootmakers. Seated he regarded steadfastly this autocratic committee, the five irresponsible senilities who created, guided and drove the entire foreign policy of Lacedaemon. As ostentatious models of austerity they were all barefooted and clad in scanty cloaks of the roughest woolen cloth, woven of

coarse undyed wool of black sheep. Their proud, stern, crafty faces suited perfectly with their garb.

The first ephor spoke:

"It will be necessary for you to make formal oath of secrecy as to all that passes here," he said. "We desire to consult you on matters of high policy."

Clearchos stood up, lifted both hands palm up and out, after the manner of the Greeks in supplication, and with raised face solemnly invoked upon himself the perpetual wrath of Zeus the Savior and Herakles of Guidance if he betrayed by word, silence, motion or look anything he learned while before the council.

"Will that suffice?" he asked. The ephors nodded and he reseated himself, facing the five silent elders. They remained silent for some time, then the eldest ephor spoke.

"The late Shah of Persia has left several sons."

"You need not say another word," said Clearchos, "I know just what you want."

"Tell us then," said the second ephor.

"Most friendly to Sparta of the present Shah's brothers," said Clearchos, "is the satrap of Lydia, who has supplied us with money to retrieve our repeated disasters and by whose aid we have finally defeated the Athenians. He

poured gold into our often-emptied treasury partly because of his family's hereditary grudge against the Athenians, but also because of his ulterior motives. Not without agreements on our part of furtherance for his schemes has he parted with so much treasure. In our last and bitterest need he probably exacted explicit contracts before he aided us. Now that we have succeeded fully, he perhaps demands requital. He aims to oust his brother from the throne and to be Shah in his stead. He knows the excellence of our men, drill and tactics. He considers that a compact body of our infantry, well led, would give him the best prospect of victory in his contemplated dash for the tiara. He has perhaps insisted that you fulfil specific treaties to which you are bound by oath."

"Go on," said the first ephor.

"If you help him and he fails, Artaxerxes will be bitterly hostile to Sparta and Persia can still do us much harm. If you refuse aid and Cyrus succeeds, his wrath will be a far more serious danger, for he is a prompt and resourceful man and might even yet revive the power of Athens against us with a league greater than ever. You are in a quandary."

"And we ask your advice," said the first ephor.

"My business is fighting, not diplomacy," said Clearchos. "I am no originator of schemes,

Tell me what you want done and I can accept or refuse. Give me an outline of two or more plans and I can reject all or choose the best."

The ephors glanced at each other.

"Tell him," said the fourth ephor, "he can be trusted."

The first ephor spoke:

"Our plan is to find a man able to attract a large force of volunteers, able to head it intelligently in camp or campaign, able to deal with foreigners, especially Asiatics, able to seem to know nothing, willing to risk his citizenship and life. He must apply openly for permission to raise a force on his own responsibility for operations of his own devising in Thrace: say about Perinthus. We must appear to weigh the matter and to keep him waiting. He must go through the motions of bringing to bear on us all the influence he can command from his family, his connection and his friends. We must appear to consent reluctantly, as if overpersuaded. He must raise a force of five thousand men or more, all from the Peloponnesus. He should muster it at Corinth. Then we shall appear to change our minds. We shall summon him to return to Sparta. He must ignore the summons and press his preparations for departure. We shall summon him a second time, threatening him with disgrace, loss of rights and even sentence of

banishment or death unless he obeys. This must be done publicly. He must refuse to obey. We shall order the harmost at Corinth to request the ctiy to arrest him. He must escape by some trick. Then we shall publicly condemn him to death as recalcitrant. He must carry on his contemplated operations in Thrace until Cyrus needs him."

"And then," said Clearchos as the speaker paused, "if the expedition fails you can disclaim any responsibility and can say to the Shah that you had no hand in it, its leader was a disgraced exile, condemned and banished long before the rebellion. If the attempt fails the man will lose his life or, if he escapes, will remain an exile. If the attempt succeeds you might rescind the sentence against him and pardon his disobedience. I see."

"Can you find us the right man?" asked the first ephor.

"I need some days to think," said Clearchos, "I do not think promptly. I must make no recommendations that you will reject."

The buildings of a Spartan farm were customarily set round a courtyard upon which they all faced. They were usually of unburnt brick, much like the adobe of Spanish America. The farmhouse was generally a modest cottage, very simple and plain, floored with beaten clay, and

roofed with sod or, at more prosperous farms, thatched with straw. Rough, unbarked trunks of young trees, cut with a fork at the top, supporting low shed-like roofs, the prototype of those stone-pillared porticoes which adorned Greek cities, formed a primitive colonnade round the courtyard. In these earth-floored verandas or in front of them most of the household and farm work was done, for the Greeks loved the open air.

The morning of the next day was warm and still, overhead the sky was deep blue and across it marched slowly isolated clouds dazzling white and so clear of outline that they had a convincing look of solidity. Their dun-brown shadows slid serially down the immense slope of Taygetus and swept across the valley of the Eurotas with an alternate impression of ease and effort as their speed increased in diving into each hollow and diminished in trailing up each ridge. An hour or two before noon Clearchos stopped in the gateway and surveyed such a farmyard. In it were a woman, two children and several dogs. The dogs were no common curs to bark and run and snarl at a stranger. Big Molossians they, short-haired, fawn-colored, suggesting lionesses in their build and pose, the fine flower of the dog-breeding of classic time. A man might trade a saddle-horse for two brace of them and know

that he had made a good bargain, for they were not only strong and fierce but were dependable, canny brutes, quick to fall upon an intruder once they had concluded he was dangerous, murderous to strange Helots, but warily polite to men in gentlemen's garb. Not one of them so much as growled. Two sat up, but the rest merely cocked one ear, and lay as they were, one eye fixed on the stranger, unhurriedly taking his measure. The children were at play. The girl, a milk-skinned black-haired child of about twelve, bareheaded, barefoot and clad only in a short blue tunic, held a bow and, when Clearchos first saw her, was nocking an arrow. Without moving from her archer's posture, feet wide apart and every muscle braced, she turned her head for one swift glance as the dogs sat up; then she resumed her deliberate aim. The soldier noted that the bow was too heavy for her and that, strain as she would, she could not pull her arrow to the head. She was aiming at an old shield set against the wall of one of the granaries. She hit it fair, a trifle low and to the left. The boy, smaller and younger than his sister, sat on a stool, his tunic was blue also and like her he was hatless and barefoot. His legs were skinny and shriveled. He kept glancing at his sister, now and again, but he was, yes he was, (Clearchos looked twice), spinning, really spinning. He

was left-handed, held the distaff in his right and twirled the spindle with his left. It reached the ground just as the visitor caught sight of him and he wound up the thread deftly, like one used to it, not at all like a boy playing girl for the moment. He paid no heed to the stranger, who took in all else in the courtyard with a glance or two, and whose eyes thereafter dwelt upon its mistress.

Under one of the rustic porticoes, in a big, solidly-timbered, carved chair, she sat; wearing a soft, pale gray robe. She was spinning, spinning steadily and evenly with a very graceful motion. She was tall, like all Spartan women, with that magnificent poise of the maidens and matrons of Caryae, which has perpetuated its name in our architecture. Fair-skinned, brown-haired and blue-eyed, her bearing interpreted a proud dignity, veiled by gentleness and good will. At sight of the stranger her face set. She gazed at him stonily without interrupting her task. They exchanged no greetings.

"And what brings you here?" she demanded harshly.

"You," answered the man of few words.

"If I brought you here," she said, "I send you away again."

"I shall not go without what I came for," he replied.

"And what may that be?" she queried.

"You," again said the man of few words.

"You will never have me, Clearchos," she said, calmly and seriously. "After all these years you are unchanged. No thought of anything except your purpose and no comprehension of how to attain it. But one instinct, to force compliance. Your brow-beating would turn even a willing woman against you. And I am not willing."

He stood silent and she went on.

"I should have given you a welcome. Be seated."

He sat upon a stool some yards from her, his eyes upon her face. She went on spinning, upon her distaff a large ball of wool, four times as much as a woman would usually take up, but which she held as easily as if the distaff were empty. She did not look at her visitor, but at her task or her children. They kept on with their play, the girl shooting her quiver empty and then going to the shield and plucking out of it the blunt target-arrows, the boy spinning. Clearchos followed her eyes toward the boy. At the moment a cloud shadow covered the yard and made even more pitiful the child's gray, leaden complexion, pimply face and deformed legs. As mother and guest shifted their glance their eyes met.

"I had been hoping that you remembered me," he said.

"I am not likely to forget you," she answered.

"I hoped you might remember our childhood, our youth, our love," he groaned.

"I have not forgotten," she said, "not a day, not an hour," she said solemnly.

"And does not your heart soften?" he asked.

"My mother's blood was that of a race of kings," she replied. "We do not transgress our vows. I warned you once, I warned you twice and when finally I swore that everything was at an end between us it was not without days of misery and nights of tears."

"But," he said, "all that is so long ago. I have suffered so long. Can you not relent?"

"My mother," she said, "was Gorgo before me and her mother was Gorgo and hers also and hers. No Gorgo ever relented. Nor I."

"I have been punished enough," he said. "More than enough. And all for a dog and a horse and a slave."

"Clearchos," she said, "you force me to talk. I do not want to talk. You are the only man I ever loved or ever will love. I adored you when I was a toddling child, and you carried me on your back. I loved you all my childish girlhood. Then I worshiped your masterfulness, your sternness, your terrible directness.

But when I was a girl grown, almost a woman, it dawned upon me that your savagery was too fierce, too cold, too indomitable. It grew horrible to me. I still trusted you, for I believed you would never be savage to me. But I came to realize that if I stood in your way in one of your rages I should be nothing to you and your rage everything. Then I warned you."

"All vapors," said Clearchos, "evil misconceptions. You keep a grudge too long. And all for a dog a horse and a slave."

"I was angered," she said wearily, "but not so much angered as hurt. I did not care for the dog or the horse or the Helot. I must have held to my vow, but it was not that. I loathed your cruelty or hated your frosty implacability. I loved you, but I came to dread you. And I gave you three warnings."

"All for two beasts and a chattel," he reiterated.

"If you had done it in wrath," she went on, "I might have forgiven it, might not have noticed it, might never have applied it to myself and dreaded you. But you were not excited, you were not wrathful. You were only resolved. You must need teach that dog what you were determined upon. You might have killed the dog at once. I should not have cared. But you must break its spirit and bend it to your will.

You told me that no woman could understand dog-breaking. Perhaps I did not, perhaps I do not, though I have seen hundreds of dogs trained, none in that way, but I understand you."

"You did not," said Clearchos, "and you never will. It is a matter of principle with me. There is no use in a disobedient dog, or horse, or slave or army."

"But you were so vindictive to the poor brute," she said, "you felt yourself thwarted unless you wrested its nature to your purposes. You could not kill it and have done. You could not let it be itself. You must torture it toward habits it could not attain."

"Two lives ruined," sneered Clearchos, "all for a dog dead twenty years ago."

"It was not only the dog," she said. "I forgave you that and warned you again. It was the same with the horse. He must be forced to your purpose. You would not trade him or sell him. You could easily have gotten another. But you must needs make him over. And the poor brute tried so and you were so harsh."

"You unhappy, I unhappy," he growled, "all for a horse."

"The second time I forgave you and warned you," she said, "and it was the same with the Helot. You might have led him, or wheedled him or coaxed, you might simply have let him

be a while and tried again. But there was no trace in you of trying to learn his nature and make his ways of thought, such as they were, serve you to bring him to what you wanted. No diplomacy for you. It must be coercion, immediate, uncompromising, unrelenting coercion. If you could not succeed by that and at once you felt defeated."

"I have learnt much diplomacy since," put in Clearchos.

"Have you truly?" she asked with an almost startled interest.

"If I have time to think," he replied almost sheepishly. "If an unexpected situation arises I am swept away by my instincts still, and find myself trying to force compliance before I know what I am doing. But give me time and I can temporize and suggest and wheedle with the best of them."

"Well for you, Clearchos," she said, "but of no avail for us. My vow relaxed no more than did your mood. If you had brained the Helot I should not have cared. But he must live and do your will, else you felt thwarted. I saw it would come to the like between you and me, that your inward demon would lash you on to coerce me into alien ways impossible for me. After the second warning I hoped, I prayed that you would not transgress again. But the slave was too

much like me for me to be blind any longer. I foresaw years of stubborn tension between you and me, foresaw myself worn out with resistance, foresaw all the more suffering for each of us since we loved each other. It could not be, not for a Gorgo."

"Were you happy with Kunobates?" he asked.

"Happy!" she exclaimed. "All my sons died save that poor child. He was the goodliest of them all and now he is a cripple. There is a Gorgo, there is always a Gorgo. But I have no warrior son."

"I do not mean grief or trouble," said Clearchos, "were you happy with him?"

"No woman," said Gorgo slowly, "is ever happy save with the one man in the world. I was content with Kunobates. He was always kind."

"I had hoped that you might marry again," he said.

"I shall marry Anaxibius," she replied.

"Do you love him?" Clearchos asked fiercely.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "will nothing make you merciful! I love you, I always shall. My vow is between us. This is our last interview. You are tormenting me needlessly. Go. Go."

Clearchos rose, bade her a formal farewell and strode off through the gate.

Two days afterwards he stood before the ephors.

"Have you found your man?" asked the first ephor.

"I trust so."

"Is he able?"

"That is for you to decide."

"Is he desperate?"

"No man alive more so."

"Name him."

"I am the man."

DODONA

DODONA

I

DEXIBIOS was standing under the two lotus trees. On his right hand, forming part of the pedestal to the statue of the Skipping-Satyr with the Wine-Skin, was a comfortable marble seat. Another was on his left similarly part of the pedestal to the statue of the Dancing-Satyr with the Grapes. But Dexibios, buffeted between elation and despair, between anticipation and dejection, was too much in a ferment of hope and fear to be able to keep still or to sit down. He had lain awake most of the night and his fitful sleep had been full of dreams, of dreams maddeningly delightful or black with horror and gloom. He had crept to his post under the lotus trees between the statues of the two jocund satyrs, long before any hint of light. He had tried to cheat himself into believing that the first light he saw was the dawn indeed. He had watched the false dawn fade and die. He had waited for the true dawn, a period that seemed to him the whole length of a long night. And now at last he saw the dawn begin and

brighten and spread her cool, clean light over the garden, till the leaves glistened, the blue and purple blossoms showed sharp and clear, the red and yellow blooms glowed, the white flowers gleamed, each of the throng of statues stood nimbused in a shimmer of radiance, the bronze statues gilded in their aureoles, the marble statues glittering pearly through silver haloes, while myriads of dew-drops sparkled like faceted gems, and the jets of the fountains turned to streams of falling diamonds. The balustrades of the terraces seemed onyx and jasper, the white walls of the villa showed iridescent and opaline, its red-tile roofs, glazed with the night moisture, flamed like coral against the intense sapphire sky. The doves that fluttered about their ridges and eaves and the peacocks that stirred numbly on the terraces blazed like jewels. The peace, the security, the opulence, the ostentation of his surroundings dazzled Dexibios, stunned him, made him feel small and worthless and impotent. He was abased before the beauty of it all and yet he reveled in it.

Then suddenly, he forgot everything, forgot sleeplessness and anxiety and his own insignificance and the beauty about him.

For Thessa came!

From between the flaring crimson of the two great mallowbushes, laden with deep red flowers,

she appeared a small, slender shape, clad only in white and without an ornament. As he sighted her, she descried him. She gestured to her maids and they seated themselves upon a marble bench on the upper terrace, already in the sunshine. Against a tangle of jasmine their blue veils showed plain, and their golden noserings waggled redly in the dawn-rays. Their bench was twice or even three times out of earshot.

And down the marble steps from the first to the second terrace, down the steps to the garden, past the Tritonesses' fountain, Thessa came. Even in the shadows her hair shone more golden than the aureole of any of the sun-gilded statues, her fluttering robe shone more pearly, more silvery than the halo about any one of the statues of marble, her teeth were whiter than the whitest of the dewy flowers, her lips redder than the reddest blooms, her eyes bluer than the bluest blossoms, her smile brighter than the sun itself. For she smiled as she came, she held out her hands to him.

As his arms embraced her hers wound close about his neck, as he kissed her so she kissed him. Almost a princess as she was she was utterly queenly to her lover and her handmaids, all generosity without reserve, all unconsciousness without reflection.

When they had greeted each other Thessa

drew him down to sit upon the long marble seat, from which they could look between the statues of the Satyrs over the fountain of the Tortoises across the whole garden to the terrace where the maids were and to the villa's walls and the stiff, erect palms and clumsy leaning date-palms, sharp against the intense azure sky.

"Don't you really love me, Dexibios?" she asked, nestling into the curve of his arm.

"You know I love you, sweetheart," he assured her.

"And don't you know that I love you?" she demanded.

"I most certainly do!" he exclaimed.

"Then why don't you look happy?" she queried. "Oughtn't you to be satisfied, when I come to meet you this way?"

"I suppose I ought," he admitted. "But——"

"But what?" she insisted.

"It seems to me," Dexibios explained, "that if you really loved me the right way we would be married already, instead of meeting by stealth in a garden."

"You silly boy," she laughed at him, "Cyrene wasn't built in a day. Anything worth while takes time. We'll be married, I'll manage that. But how could we be married already?"

"Hasn't your father promised you," he cate-

chized her, "that you shall choose your own husband for yourself?"

"He has," she answered.

"Hasn't he pledged himself that he would urge no suitor upon you," Dexibios went on, "that he would say nothing against any suitor to bias your choice, that he would leave the decision entirely to your spontaneous preference?"

"Dear old dad!" she chuckled. "He just has. No other father ever was half so good."

"Hasn't he taken oath to his pledge in Aphrodite's temple before all her priestesses and priests?" he continued.

"You know," Thessa agreed. "You were there."

"Hasn't he had his purpose and his pledge and his oath proclaimed in full market before all the town-hall and the people?" Dexibios pursued. "Hasn't he had it heralded through every city of the Pentapolis, hasn't it been advertised from Paraetionium to Sabrata? Doesn't all the world know of it?"

"Everybody knows about it, of course," Thessa asserted.

"Won't he keep his word?" Dexibios queried.

"Of course he will," Thessa triumphed, "that's how I know you and I are sure to be married. I'll never choose anyone but you. So I never can marry anyone else."

"But if he will keep his word," Dexibios held on, "why do you keep me waiting? Why not tell him I am your choice and be done with it?"

"Because, you silly boy," she said, "that would ruin everything and make it impossible for me ever to be your wife. For Daddy would say that his promise, and his pledge and his oath and his proclamation and his advertising that I was to marry the man of my choice applied only to men fit by birth and station and wealth to aspire to marry the daughter of the richest man in Cyrene, the richest man in the Pentapolis, the richest man in all Libya between Egypt and Carthage. He would say that no one could pretend that his promise and his pledge and his oath and his proclamation and his heralding left me free to choose a pauper orphan hanger-on of his retinue (for you are nothing more than that now, Dexibios dear, and you know it, though I love you better than all the world and though you are going to be my husband and a very great and important and notable man before I get done with you) any more than to a menial or a porter or a slave or a Nubian or a pigmy. And all the districts and cities and citizens and town-hallers and priestesses and priests would say he was right. And then he would say my folly and frivolity and undutiful impiety had absolved him from his advertising and his heralding and his

proclamation and his oath and his pledge and his promise. And all the priests and priestesses and town-hallers and citizens and cities and districts would say he was right and that what was more he had been wrong even to ever think of such a monstrous innovation as allowing a girl to choose her husband and that nobody but a fool would be so complacent to an ungrateful little pig of a daughter. And then I should have to marry some fat, old, red-faced fright with a big belly just like his round money-bags, and with a town house and a country house and a stable of four-horse chariot-teams and a yacht and all that sort of thing and I should be miserable forever after."

"But none of your suitors are old, fat, red-faced men," Dexibios protested irrelevantly.

"Of course not, silly," Thessa retorted, "Daddy's proclamation has gone everywhere, so all the rich fathers have sent their dandified sons and all the rich uncles have sent their handsome nephews, in hopes that I will fall in love with their good looks and choose one of them. But if Daddy were choosing a husband for me all the rich uncles would be after me for themselves, yes, and as many of the rich fathers as happen to be widowers. And Daddy would marry me to the richest man who would make the biggest settlement on me and be content with the small-

est dowry, of course, like any other Daddy. And I shouldn't have any say in the matter any more than any other girl. And you would never, never see me any more. So there."

"But as it is," Dexibios complained, "you smile at all the handsome nephews and shapely sons, till I am just ready to slaughter the whole convocation of them."

"They are such fun," Thessa gurgled, "but you mustn't want to kill them. They'll want to kill you when I marry you, but they won't. They'll be polite and congratulate us properly and go off and get married every one of them and forget about us as completely as we'll forget about them."

"I don't see why you are so confident of our getting married," Dexibios gloomed, "at this rate we'll die of old age before we marry."

"No we won't," Thessa exclaimed, "we'll be married soon. I knew I'd find a plan and one came to me, the right one too, the very night after I saw you last. No, it was three nights ago. I had a dream. You know that big picture of Apellides in the south gallery, the Oaks of Dodona? Well, I dreamed that you and I were at Dodona and stood hand in hand on the edge of the temple-platform, and asked Zeus were we to be man and wife. And the Lovers' Oak rustled, every bough of it, and on the Oak of

Assent and Refusal the long Bough of Affirmation rustled, all its leaves at once, and the Oak of Prosperity rustled and the Oak of Happiness. Now that dream is a sign. And dear old Daddy will acknowledge it as a sign."

"You'll tell him!" Dexibios exclaimed. "Then why not declare I am your choice without telling him."

"I'll tell him of the dream," Thessa rebuked him. "But I shan't mention you, stupid. I'll tell Daddy I dreamed that I stood at Dodona hand in hand with a man and asked Zeus for countenance and that all the favorable boughs and branches and trees rustled in concert. He'll accede to the indication of the dream and we'll all go to Dodona. I've a splendid plot that will ensure you're being one of the retinue. And I shan't tell you what it is either. And at Dodona we'll question the oaks and when they affirm my choice Daddy can't refuse me."

"Suppose they confirm some other suitor's pretensions?" Dexibios queried.

"You dreadful irreligious boy," Thessa exclaimed. "Didn't I tell you that you held my hand in the dream?"

"Suppose the dream was false or meaningless?" Dexibios interjected.

Thessa clapped her soft little hand over his mouth.

"You awful, sacrilegious, irreverent, blasphemous child!" she cried out. "You'll spoil the blessing of the dream and call down a curse on us! Aren't we sure and certain after such a dream as that? It was as plain as life, plainer. I could hear the gusts of wind and feel the sunshine. We are assured of success. You have nothing to do but keep quiet, be careful not to sulk and let me make my arrangements. Meantime you can meet me here every time you see the signal at sunset and find the safety signal outside the gate. And now it is getting late and you must go."

In fact Dexibios did go, but not at once.

II

Polyteles of Cyrene was certainly the richest man in all Greek Lybia and probably the fondest father in any part of the Greek world. Likewise he was a pious man, with a proper respect for omens of all kinds and for dreams in particular. When his only child and darling daughter told him that it had been revealed to her in a dream that her choice of a husband was to be made at Dodona according to the voices of the speaking oaks, he accepted the dream as a sign from the gods. He proceeded

to make sacrifices of the proper number and kind at the proper temples to authenticate the message from heaven. When every sacrifice came out right the first time he regarded the injunction as unquestionably genuine, as any orthodox being must. Thereupon he made ready for his voyage across the sea to Epirus. The news produced a great ferment among Thessa's numerous suitors and all the harbor side of Apollonia bustled with preparations. The less opulent among the suitors clubbed together and engaged ships in common, some ten to a ship, some eight, some five, some threes and twos. Eight were wealthy enough to have each a ship to himself. Echeseolos of Barca and Locrides of Tauchira, self-sufficient fops, both affluent and ostentatious, must needs have two ships apiece to accommodate themselves, their servants, and their traveling gear and animals; while Mertander of Berenice surpassed them all in pretentiousness as in property and chartered three ships for himself and his following. Polyteles required but five, one for himself and his daughter and their personal servants and belongings, two for his retinue, and one for his equipages and one for his horses and mules. For, like Mertander, Locrides and Echeseolos, he considered it equally beneath his dignity and inimical to his comfort to haggle for draft cattle

at a foreign port and to travel a strange road with beasts equally strange to him and his drivers.

Many of the wealthy fathers and uncles were quite willing to lavish money on their heirs for a journey to Cyrene and a residence there and display before Polyteles and gifts to his daughter, but were unwilling to risk their sons or nephews and their cash on the venture of a sea-voyage. So whereas more than twenty youths from Cyrene itself had aspired to her and more than a hundred had flocked into Cyrene from as far east as the lesser Cathabathmus, from the oases of the south even beyond Agila, Tabudium and Cydamus, from the westering ports past Simnuana and Amaraeas to the north of the Zuchis, full forty of these were cautious or their guardians were timid, so that those suitors of Thessa the daughter of Polyteles who sailed from Apollonia in Cyreniaca for Ambracia in Acarnania were exactly eighty in number and the ships that carried them were twenty-two. So that the fleet that set sail from the harbor of Apollonia was of twenty-eight sail all told, for Polyteles prudently employed Tamos of Naucratis, a skilful pilot, possessed of a stout ship, to sail in the lead and to guide the convoy over the waters.

At dawn on the tenth day before the summer

solstice they weighed anchor from the harbor of Apollonia and sailing all day long at full speed under a clear sky before a strong fair south-westerly wind they entered about sunset into the roadstead off Phaestus in Crete. At Phaestus they remained three nights. About midnight of the third night the wind shifted to southeasterly and Tamos, going about the inns and also the camps by the strand outside the harbor, roused the servants of the suitors and lastly the retinue of Polyteles. At sunrise they steered westerly, coasting along the shore of Crete to Cimarus. From there they crossed past Aegilia to Cythera. As being lovers and bound upon a mission of love they spent the next day in sacrifices and prayers about the temple of the great goddess of Cythera, Aphrodite Anadyomene, whom the Romans later called Venus.

The second morning the wind held and they were at sea before the sun rose. About the slack time of the afternoon they saw the forested ridges of Zacynthus rising in front of them from the sapphire sea. Before the shadows of its peaks were long on the waves they skirted Mount Elatus and came safely into the harbor of Zacynthus town. As the wind again shifted during the night to due southerly they made haste again to put to sea and skimming between the mainland and the flanks of Same, Ithaca and

Leucas, they entered the Ambracian gulf and by dusk were moored off Ambracia itself.

At Ambracia they remained three days to rest the horses and mules and to refresh themselves from the sea and in order that the majority of the suitors might have time to chaffer with the dealers and to purchase for themselves riding horses, pack mules, carriage mules, carriages, saddles, and other fittings for their journey. When all were provided they set out upon the morning of the fourth day, departing from Ambracia by the Thesprotian gate and following the road along the left bank of the river Arachthus. Polyteles, always easy-going and fond of ease, traveled slowly and camped early each day, so that they were five days along the road. Therefore it was the fifth day after the summer solstice they streamed into Dodona, a cavalcade of more than two thousand people, of whom some three hundred were hired Acarnanians, and the rest, more than eighteen hundred in all, reckoning with Polyteles and with the suitors, their serving men and servants and slaves, had come over sea from Apollonia in Cyreniaca. The inhabitants of Dodona declared that no such company had ever come to their shrine upon a private mission, and that even of the ambassadors of kings and the delegates of

haughty republics few came with so great a following.

Polyteles lodged with Anaxiboulus of Dodona, a notable man among her citizens, between whom and himself there was an old bond of friendship, since the great uncle of Anaxiboulus had been a guest at Cyrene of Mexides, Polyteles' grandfather on his mother's side. Some of the suitors also found family friends with whom they lodged. Others disposed themselves in the inns and yet others preferred to camp outside of the town.

After all were rested from the fatigues of the journey and the exhaustion of sea-faring, after they had satisfied too their curiosity by visiting all the sights of the neighborhood, the breeze which had brought them so swiftly from Libya to Epirus continued to blow day and night, increasing almost to a gale, so that every bough of every tree rustled continually and consulting the oracle had to be postponed until the wind should fall. Steadily it continued to blow. Therefore time hung heavy upon the hands of the suitors, whereupon Okypodes of Tubaktis, the best athlete among the suitors and Lerops of Zigrae, who was esteemed the handsomest of them all, proposed that they while away the time with contests of skill and strength, alleging that such would not only be diverting but would win

the favor of the god and please the heiress., Dranor of Tarichiae Marcomada suggested that Polyteles and his daughter be invited to be present at the contests.

When Polyteles was approached on the subject he said he must have time to reflect. Thereupon he consulted Thessa. Crafty little Thessa knew just what she meant to accomplish and precisely how she meant to bring it to pass. She saw an opportunity to win a preliminary advantage. She chatted ramblingly and at large. Polyteles had no suspicion that she was influencing him. Quite to the contrary, he imagined she was yielding reluctantly to his more elderly views.

When he spoke to the suitors' committee he spoke positively:

"I won't have my daughter's choice of a husband marred by any fatalities. No all-your-might-everything-fair fighting. Neither of us wants anybody killed or maimed. No, nor anybody dropping dead, either. No two hundred stade races, no wrestling. And no boxing, either, we don't want any of you with his front teeth out or an eye gone. Any reasonable contests will please her and please me. But we don't want contests started if they are to turn into a fierce competition, anything to win and all hate to the winner. Let those enter each contest who please

and let us all applaud the winner and praise those who did well, all of them, even if they do not win. I myself will provide suitable prizes for all the contests."

There followed competitions in running short dashes, in leaping, in throwing the discus and the spear, in archery, in dancing, in flute-playing. Thessa and her father watched them all and wise little Thessa, who knew just when and how to speak to her father spoke to good purpose. For when they had run several races Polyteles remarked:

"I have a sort of relation here, a distant connection of my wife's. He can run pretty well. I'm not sure that any of you could beat him."

Now Dexibios, though totally without property, was a free-born citizen of Cyrene in good standing. His father and most of his uncles had been killed in the wars with the Ammonite Libyans. His grandparents and his mother had died of the plague. And the rascality of an elder brother had left him penniless. Except for his poverty he was as good as any of the suitors. It was not possible to object to Dexibios on any grounds. Therefore he raced with the suitors and after many trials over courses of varying lengths he came out a close second to Okypodes himself. The suitors were ready to defer to Polyteles in anything, of course, and they liked

Dexibios, who was always unassuming, and pleasant-spoken and an agreeable comrade. So it came about naturally that Dexibios took part in all the contests. In most he came out second or third and in some even first. He was a perfect flute-player, as good an archer as the best of them and far surpassed them all at throwing the discus. Polyteles was manifestly proud of him and told him so.

"If it hadn't been for you," he said, "all these outsiders would have taken all the prizes. You are the only good man here from Cyrene."

On the fifth day after their arrival, the tenth after the summer solstice, the wind fell during the afternoon. At night it ceased altogether. The eleventh day after the solstice dawned dead calm, with faint gusts of breeze now and then, a perfect day for consulting the oracle.

Soon after sunrise they were all assembled on the great stone platform in front of the principal temple.

III

The sacred hill of Dodona with its broad, flat-tish top and five radiating spurs was much like a clumsy human right-hand laid palm down with the fingers spread out, the thumb pointing northward. The arm of the hand was a spur from Mt. Tomarus, a bare dome of short verdure to

the southwest. On the west was the great temple, the lesser temples behind it. The main platform, paved with the porous limestone of the district, was a nearly square quadrilateral so spacious that even ten thousand human beings did not crowd it. From it one could descry a glint of the sea on either side of Mt. Tomarus. Right against the south flank of the mountain, just where sealine and skyline met, the heights of Corcyra would be made out in clear weather. The ridge which formed the big finger of the hand pointed to Lake Pambotis, and the little finger toward the ranges of Mt. Lacmon, whose vast pine-forests showed as mere streaks and splotches of blackness across the miles between. From the great platform the view all round upon the plain was most beautiful, looking over the infinity of small hedged, hand-tilled fields, where mattock and spade and hoe had abolished everything like a weed, and where save for some scanty orchards, fully five miles away, not a tree was in sight.

That was the most notable factor in the effect of the view from Dodona; not a tree, separately visible as a tree, was in the landscape, except the fourteen huge, sacred oaks.

If one regarded the hill as a hand one might say that an oak grew on each knuckle of it, three on each of the four fingers and two on the

broadest and shortest ridge that formed the thumb. Those two were the largest; the nearer called the Tree of Zeus or the Divine Oak was fully a hundred feet high, perfectly symmetrical and with compact branches spreading forty feet in every direction; the outer, called the Tree of Kings or the Royal Oak, was equally shapely and scarcely smaller. On the ridge corresponding to the index finger stood the Tree of Ares or the Warriors' Oak, the Tree of Pallas or the State-men's Oak and the Tree of Aphrodite or the Lovers' Oak. On the ridge answering to the big finger of the hand the three oaks stood not at the crest of the ridge but at its extreme edge to the right. They were called the Tree of Hermes or Merchants' Oak, the Tree of Hera or Mothers' Oak and the Tree of Demeter (or of Prosperity) or the Lucky Oak. The outermost and the middlemost of the three on the next ridge, likewise stood far to the right near the marge of the ravine between the ridges. They were called the Tree of Apollo or Artists' Oak and the Tree of the Muses or Poets' Oak. The innermost of those three was known as the Tree of Artemis (or of Happiness) or the Joyful Oak. On the ridge answering to the little finger of the hand, stood the Tree of Kronos or Accursed Oak and the Tree of Hades or Doom Oak. At its inner end was the Tree of Affirmation or

Denial, called also the No and Yes Oak. This last had been broken off short from the ground and stood, as it had stood for countless generations, the splintered top of its trunk pointing to the sky and its only two branches pointing north and south. That which pointed north was called the Bough of Refusal and that which pointed south, all of fifty feet long, was called the Bough of Consent.

The other oaks were all perfect, but except the Tree of Zeus and the Royal Oak, they were trees of ragged outline and open growth, with branches far apart, separate and distinct. Each branch of each oak had its name and to each was attached a particular meaning. The manner of consulting the oracle was to ask one question at a time and observe which bough of which tree rustled next after the question was asked. No branch of the Divine Oak or of the Tree of Kings had any particular name or any special signification attached to it. These trees were held to answer each in its entirety, the definiteness of the answer increasing with the amount of the rustling.

Near the head of the glen between the thumb and the index finger, was a raised platform of pure white marble, about forty feet square. This was called the Suppliants' Stone and from it every one of the fourteen oaks could be seen

at one and the same time, no one obstructed by any other. Upon this platform those who consulted the oracle stood with twenty-eight priests, two of whom watched each tree. Under each tree stood two other priests, so that it required the constant services of fifty-six priests to interpret the oracle. For it was a doctrine unassailable and a dogma universally accepted that if there was any disagreement among the priests as to which tree rustled, or any lack of unanimity among the four told off for that tree as to which bough rustled, it must be considered that no answer had been vouchsafed and the question must be asked a second time. Any doubt expressed by the votaries or by the spectators, was also held to vitiate the oracle and nullify the response. Only when all were agreed was it considered that the god had really replied and been manifestly present to his worshipers.

The dignitaries of the temple when informed of the nature of Polyteles' mission were loud in acclamations, holding it a magnificent augury that the five trees he meant to consult, the Divine Oak, the Lovers' Oak, the Lucky Oak, the Joyful Oak and the No and Yes Oak were precisely those that stood nearest to the great platform and most easily seen from the Suppliants' Stone.

Upon that elevated station were packed fully

two hundred persons, the priests, the suitors, Polyteles' retainers, Polyteles himself and Thessa. Upon the platform were gathered more than three thousand people, the retinues of the suitors, waiting suppliants with their followings, and curious or idle townsfolk. The proper sacrifices had been offered, the Tree of Zeus and the Bough of Approval had rustled notably and with them the Royal Oak had joined its deepest humming whirr. The priests congratulated Polyteles. By this sign Zeus welcomed him as a king, and honored him equally with kings. When the Divine Oak, the Royal Oak and the Bough of Approval on the No and Yes Oak rustled in unison and no leaf on any other tree stirred, the priests interpreted the marked willingness of the god to be consulted and his kindness toward the votaries. Polyteles then suggested that the suitors stand forth in turn and each ask whether he was to be Thessa's husband. The chief priest, his red streamer fluttering at the end of his gilded wand, signaled to each pair in turn of the priests under each tree. All signified their readiness.

The sky was a strong dark blue, almost the color of lapis lazuli. Not a cloud broke its expanse. No haze showed anywhere upon the hills or plains all round the horizon. Although it was full midsummer and the afternoon would be hot,

the noon-heat was not heralded by the morning-air, which was fresh and almost crisp. The dazzling sun was already high and poured a flood of brilliance over the world. Everything showed clear and sharp in the abundant light. The sacred oaks stood cleanly-outlined and definite against the sky, till almost every leaf showed separately.

As the sacrifices had been made for Polyteles as suppliant others had to be made for the suitors. For them collectively the chief priest made a prayer and for them all he cast incense upon the glowing charcoal in a bronze brazier standing upon a tall tripod of chased bronze.

Up, up into the clear air rose the thread of incense smoke, straight and unwavering, without a break, and the Bough of Assent rustled softly, while no other tree stirred any leaf.

Thereupon the chief priest affirmed the consent of the god to be consulted by the suitors in succession.

First, Mertander of Berenice stood forth at the corner of the Suppliants' Stone, in full view of all upon it and of the throng upon the platform, bareheaded he stood and with lifted arms and palms turned to the sky.

"Oh Zeus," he prayed, "make answer to me whether I am to be husband to Thessa the daughter of Polyteles of Cyrene."

And he and the crowd and the throng all beheld the Bough of Denial rustle so strongly that its black-green seemed to whiten in the wind, and of the Bough of Affirmation not a leaf stirred nor any leaf of any other tree, unless perchance a faint whisper may have ruffled the surface of the Tree of Kronos and of the Tree of Hades, the dread oaks of Cursing and Doom.

Therefore Mertander recognized that he was not to be the son-in-law of Polyteles and he stood aside.

Following him came Echesepolos of Barca, and Locrides of Tauchira, and they fared even as he.

Then in succession stood up and prayed: Hermesilaos of Assaria, Nephrodoros of Charax, Apostemon of Paliuros, Tamsophos of Megerthis, Mestianax of Tagulis, Brenctor of Zagazaena, Stlengides of Cyrathion and Phlyrax of Leptis; for these eight were those whose wealth had enabled them to have each a ship for himself. But they fared no better than their richer rivals.

Then stood up and prayed Gengron of Simnuana, Rhexenor of Auziqua, Semnotheos of Darnae, Praxides of Kerkar, Thax of Amastoros, Aigityps of Tabudion, Opor of Antipyr-gos, Lerops of Zigræ, Okypodes of Tubaktis, Dranor of Tarichia, Marcomada and others in

succession until all those had prayed who came two or three in a ship. And ever after each prayer the Bough of Negation hummed and murmured and whirred in the gust that rustled its leaves and perhaps the Doom Oak and the Oak of Cursing gave out a ghost of a sound, but upon no other tree did a leaf quiver in the still air and the dazzling sunshine.

Then all the other suitors, even to the eightieth and last, stood up and prayed, and not one fared any better than any other, but in sight and hearing of all the suitors and priests and of all the multitude gathered upon the platform the god manifestly denied that any one of the eighty should be husband of Thessa the daughter of Polyteles of Cyrene.

And when there were but five left to be heard all those few that remained were wrought up with anticipation, for each thought that he was to be the lucky man.

And when but one remained, he was Neptilides of Augila in the desert, who in the competition of beauty had been adjudged third handsomest of all after Lerops of Zigræ, who was adjudged first in looks and Dexibios who was adjudged second. And Neptilides, because the other seventy-nine had been disappointed by the oracle, made sure that he was to win Thessa and her dowry and the inheritance of her father, and he

stood forth swelling with elation and self-esteem. But like the rest he was abashed. And, because he had presumptuously made sure of the favor of the god before asking, all the other suitors laughed aloud at his discomfiture and the throng upon the platform hooted in derision.

And then Polyteles stood forth and asked whether the oracle would at all signify what man his daughter should wed. And the Tree of Zeus and the Tree of Kings murmured aloud together in all men's sight and hearing, and the Bough of Affirmation manifestly rustled along all its length.

Then Polyteles queried in what manner the response would be made. And not a leaf of any tree rustled, stirred or quivered.

Then Thessa spoke to her father and he to the priests. And the chief priest lifted up his voice and asked of the god whether the unspoken prayer of Polyteles would be pleasing to the deity. And the answer of the Oaks was as before, favorable and gracious.

Thereupon Thessa took her stand before the brazier of hot coals, set upon its tall tripod, and sprinkled incense upon the coals and asked aloud whether she would be permitted to address the god. And the Bough of Affirmation was stirred through all its leaves and the Lovers' Oak and the Joyful Oak sang with all their branches at

once, and a faint sigh, as it seemed, proceeded even from the great Oaks of Zeus and of Kings. And from the incense which Thessa had offered the smoke rose into the air straight as a peeled wand, forty feet, even fifty feet it rose, and on its blue-gray length against the dark blue sky was not a break or a ripple or an undulation.

Then all the priests sang aloud for joy of the happy augury, and the people shouted mightily.

Then Thessa stood forth and turned her face up to the blue sky and lifted her rosy hands and spread their palms upward and spoke aloud in her thin, clear voice:

"O Zeus, is it your will that I should marry the man of my choice?"

And all the favorable boughs and trees rustled at once.

Then again she asked:

"Is my choice to be binding upon all those who hoped for me and upon my father Polyteles?"

And the answer came as before in all men's sight and hearing.

Then a third time she asked:

"Is it your will that my father and all my former suitors applaud my choice and favor my bridegroom?"

And the ears and eyes of all men recognized the unmistakably emphatic affirmation.

Then Thessa turned and beckoned Dexibios,

and he stepped to her side, for he was near, and she took his hand.

"O Zeus," she called, "this is the man whom I love and who loves me, this man whom I hold by the hand. Him have I chosen for my mate. Is it your will that he be my husband?"

Thereupon the Bough of Affirmation buzzed with the gust that whipped all its branches and tore at its leaves, and the Tree of Happiness, and the Tree of Prosperity and the Lovers' Oak sang with all their branches together and the deep booming drone from the Tree of Kings and the Divine Oak sounded strongly.

And all the people cheered. Whereupon thereafter they chanted a hymn of Thanksgiving and that very night Polyteles held the wedding festivities of Dexibios and his daughter Thessa.

THE ELEPHANT'S EAR

THE ELEPHANT'S EAR*

Hannibal, cum in praealti fluminis transitum elephantos non posset compellere . . . jussit ferocissimum elephantum sub aure vulnerari et eum qui vulnerasset tranato statim flumine procurrere: elephantus exasperatus ad persequendum doloris sui auctorem tranavit amnem et reliquis idem audendi fecit exemplum.

Julius Frontinus, STRATEGEMATICON, I, VII, 2.

“**N**OT another man,” said Hannibal, “shall cross that river until those elephants are all safely over. We cannot afford to lose them, and we have none too many men on this side now.”

He glowered at his brother with his domineering, preoccupied scowl, his dark face, small as it was between the low browpiece of his severe helmet and his tight curling sable beard, contracted still more in the concentration of his resolve, his black eyes glittering, his eyelids puckered, his brow knitted.

Mago smiled back his big, bland, blond, blue-eyed smile.

“Leave me a third of the cavalry,” he said softly, “and I will hold off the Gauls until to-morrow night; yes, and until noon of day after to-morrow—hold them off without half trying. You won’t lose an elephant.”

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"Your one instinct," his brother retorted, "is to get into risky situations for the mere dare-devil delight of seeing how nearly you can go to just missing destruction for nothing and feeling the glow of satisfaction that comes from your dexterity in extricating yourself. We'll get into tight and scary places enough without manufacturing artificial traps for ourselves. Not another man shall cross till the last elephant is over. We are holding back the savages none too handily now. Listen to that!"

The comparative silence about them, disturbed only by the swish of the wind rocked boughs, the murmur of the sulky river, the guttural calls of the mahouts and the occasional squeal of an elephant, had been accentuated by the far off fringe of intermittent but fairly continuous shouts, short, barking, yelping calls, long drawn, shrill howlings, and at intervals the faint sound of a sustained burst of ferocious yells or exultant cheers. As Hannibal spoke a longer, louder and less distant outbreak made itself heard.

"I could hold them off easily," Mago repeated. "I could give the mahouts all the rest of to-day and all of to-morrow to work with the beasts."

"I mean to camp three leagues forward to-night," said Hannibal, "and I hope to make six leagues to-morrow. We've no time to waste. And suppose we needed a rest and you could do

what you promise, what guarantee have we that the brutes will be any more tractable in a day or in ten? We don't know yet what the trouble is." He turned to the bevy of young nobles who acted as his unofficial staff orderlies.

"Find the head mahout," he commanded, "and fetch the interpreter."

Two of the mounted youths galloped off; the rest kept their fretful horses at a respectful distance behind the two generals, who from their knoll overlooked the hopeless confusion of the milling, heaving herd of squealing, recalcitrant elephants, the broad river and the tangled woods on the further side. The woods gave no token that fifty thousand men had vanished into them since dawn, but the other bank of the river, as far as they could see up and down it, was all ropy, greasy mud, puddled to a paste by the convulsive, frantic struggles of the back-slipping feet of the myriads of men, horses, mules and cattle which had scaled it only by the expenditure of their last fraction of strength. As Hannibal scanned the surface of the river, swirling with sullen eddies, he kept a tight rein on his fidgety little bay. Mago's reins lay on the neck of his tall sorrel, which he sat without visible effort, as comfortable as if he had been on a sofa.

The orderly who had sought the head mahout quickly brought him. He wagged his turban,

waved his arms and poured out a stream of excited vocables.

"Where's that interpreter?" Hannibal demanded.

Two more orderlies dashed off, and after an interminable wait, which the Asiatic filled with gesticulations and floods of unintelligible gabble, all three returned together. The interpreter was across the river, beyond present reach.

Hannibal cursed the interpreter.

"That's what you get," said Mago with exasperating sweetness, "for your insistence on importing bogus experts from the other side of the dawn. If you had left the vestibules of the sunrise undisturbed and hadn't ransacked the Ganges Valley for alleged adepts at elephant driving we should all be better off. You should have been able to spend on something worth while the fortune you lavished on obtaining these dandelion-stem-fingered, spindle-shanked exotic incompetents. And if your elephants were in charge of plain, honest Numidians, even if anything went wrong, which is unlikely, we should be able to understand what it was."

"Talk never accomplished anything," said Hannibal. "Can't anybody else understand this man?"

"I have an idea," said Mago, "that I begin to catch the drift of his repetitions. I have picked

up some words of these men's tongue. Shall I try?"

"By all means," said his brother impatiently.

Mago questioned the man, made him repeat his answers slowly over and over, and reported:

"He says the elephants know they cannot climb the further bank and will not enter the river."

"Do you expect me to believe," Hannibal exclaimed, "that an elephant can judge of the practicability of a bank at that distance?"

"I don't expect anything," Mago retorted; "I'm only telling you what this fellow says as near as I can catch his meaning. Anyhow, you ought to know as much about elephants as I do."

"When we left Carthagená," said Hannibal wearily, "I thought I knew all about elephants. Every day since I've learned something new about them. Now I feel I am just on the verge of beginning to learn about them. I am approaching the point where their probable usefulness in battle in Italy seems no longer to outweigh the difficulties of getting them there. If it were not that they are so very useful at just the right situation, if it were not for the universal and unreasonable dread of them among the Romans, I'd abandon the whole herd here and now. As it is we must get them on."

"Why not take them up or down stream beyond where the bank is mauled?" Mago inquired.

"If I understand this man right he says he could have got them over if they had been sent first instead of held till now."

"You know very well," said Hannibal severely, "that we cannot now dislodge the natives from either of the vantage points on the river, nor can we now work round either with the force we have left, and they are being reinforced hourly. No, we must cross here."

He turned to the force of orderlies.

"Scatter!" he ordered. "Find Hannibal at once!"

Hannibal the Scout, the namesake of the great commander, was the most hated and the most feared man in the army, reputed the cruellest man alive and known for the most cool headed, boldest, most reckless, most calculating and most competent man in the whole corps of spies, scouts and skirmishers which he commanded. He had been born in the lowest slums of Carthage on the night when all its rabble were feasting at the expense of Hamilcar Barca, who honored with lavish magnificence the birth-anniversary of his heir. After that heir of the great Admiral the slum baby had been named by its mother. Before it was three years old its parents died or abandoned it, and the waif grew up into an amazing precocity of vice. Brought by chance to the Admiral's notice, the street boy

caught his fancy and was taken to Spain. There he developed marvelous capacities of usefulness and had won and held his place as chief scout. He had a knowledge of men such as only slum dwellers acquire, and a store of woodcraft wonderful even for one forest bred and more than miraculous for a former wharf-rat.

Promptly he came, leaning on the neck of his lathered calico pony, his escorts of ragged outcasts half surrounding him, half following. On his right rode his trusted helper, a Spanish tribesman incredibly tall, incredibly lean, long necked, lantern jawed, mounted on a fleabitten white pony. The remainder were unsavory rogues; Spanish, Mauretanian and Numidian irregular horsemen and Mauretanian runners—scantily clad, gaunt figures, all cheek bones, collar bones, ribs and staring, skinny joints, but running easily and long-breathed among, alongside of or behind the scampering ponies. Their leader was a dark man—darker than his dark namesake the swarthy commander. He ranged his pony by Hannibal's horse, listened to his chief's laconic explanation, questioned the head mahout (he knew something of every language spoken in the motley host), confirmed Mago's interpretations and asked what was wanted.

"Get them across, and at once," Hannibal commanded.

The scout was perhaps the only subordinate who did not stand in awe of the redoubtable leader.

"That is always the way," he snarled; "any difficult and dangerous task is put on me, and no thanks after I do it."

"Keep your temper," his General told him. "Can you do it?"

"I can," the scout replied.

"Then do it and no more talk," said the General.

"I cannot guarantee to get them all over safely," the scout warned him. "This is worse than any river they ever swam. I may lose one or ten."

"Do your best," said Hannibal. "I give you a free hand."

"One more point," said his namesake. "I must have your leave to kill one after I get them over."

"Kill one!" the General exclaimed indignantly. "Nonsense! What for?"

"I won't say what for," the scout replied. "I know how to get the herd over if you will let me, but I refuse to do it unless I may kill one of those I get across. If you refuse I wash my hands of the job. Get 'em across yourself. You may for all of me, but I help not a particle."

The chief measured with his keen eyes the sulky scout.

He read men instantly.

"Have your own way," he said.

"Pledge it in plain words," the scout insisted. "I'll have no blame through any uncertainties as to orders."

"Get the elephants over and kill one afterward if necessary."

"It will be the least valuable of the lot," the scout told him. He spoke to the mahout, who ran beside his pony as he trotted off. Arrived at the herd, Hannibal the Scout asked:

"Which is your most intractable beast?"

"Barranith," the mahout replied.

"Point him out," the scout commanded. The mahout did so.

"Get chains, mallets and stakes and peg him down tight by the river bank, facing across the river," the scout ordered.

Barranith was by no means the largest bull elephant of the herd. A dozen exceeded him in height and weight. But it took the six biggest, hustling him on all sides, to hold him while the dodging, skipping, squeaking mahouts pegged him down tight.

"The instant you displease him he is worse than a wild elephant," the head mahout told

Hannibal the Scout as they watched the operation.

When Barranith was secured sufficiently, to the mahout's satisfaction, the scout commanded:

"Now double chain him."

When Barranith, still grumbling, but no longer resisting, had been fastened as they would have fastened a mad elephant, the scout ordered the other elephants taken some fifty yards back from the river and gave orders to feed them slowly.

He questioned Barranith's own mahout.

"What does he like best to eat?"

"Millet cakes and honey," said the Asiatic.

"Got any millet cakes?" the scout queried.

"Yes," said the man.

"Give me three," he commanded.

Then he galloped back to Hannibal and Mago on their knoll. It was about noon and Hannibal was fuming with impatience.

"What now?" he inquired.

"I need some honey," said the scout, "and some pepper. Is there any left of either in the army?"

"My cook has pepper," Mago put in.

"Is he on this side of the river?" his brother demanded.

"I believe so," Mago ruminated doubtfully.

"Send an orderly after him," said Hannibal, "and get that pepper, or go yourself if you like."

Mago sent an orderly.

"And the honey?" the scout persisted.

Mago again came to the rescue.

"My surgeon has a kidskin of strained honey to dress wounds with; but he won't give it for anything else."

"Is he on this side of the river?" Hannibal queried again.

"Yes," said Mago positively.

"Well, get that honey," his brother ordered. "How much do you need?" he asked the scout.

"Enough to fill the hollow of my hand," he replied.

Orderlies set out in search of the surgeon. Presently one brought the pepper. From the surgeon came a refusal.

"Go get the honey yourself, Mago," said Hannibal, in his most imperious tones.

Mago, his kindly eyes a-twinkle at the humor of the situation, signaled two of the orderlies with a gentle nod and an easy wave of the hand to each. The three galloped off, and when they returned one of the youths carried a small kidskin bulging under his arm.

After he had been provided with sufficient pepper and honey Hannibal the Scout left the two generals and their escort on their knoll and

cantered down to where Barranith was fastened. He dismounted some distance from the animal, beckoned to the mahout and conferred with him. He took the three fat, moist cakes, smeared honey on two, made with his finger a hole in the third, put in the pepper and plugged the hole with a bit of the cake. Then he told the mahout to stand behind his charge. He went in front of the anchored beast. Putting one of the cakes on the point of his spear he held it toward Barranith. The elephant smelled it, took it and engulfed it in his crimson bag of a mouth with visible satisfaction. The scout approached until he was just out of reach of the trunk and held out another cake. Barranith's trunk reached for it. But the scout backed off a pace, held the cake up and made as if to throw it. Promptly Barranith curled his trunk high up in the air over his forehead and opened his slack, slobbering cavern of a mouth. The scout threw the cake straight and true, and Barranith's approval was visible all over his huge bulk. Then the scout backed off another pace and held up the third cake. Again Barranith spread wide his mouth, again the scout threw accurately. Then, as the pepper took effect, the great dun beast made good his claim to the title of "the trumpeter," tooted, squalled and blared his rage,

strained at his shackles and strove to reach his insulter.

"Will he get loose?" the scout called.

The mahout, peering from the bush where he had hidden himself, squeaked out a quavering reply.

"Not yet, lord. He is safely held yet."

The scout slowly drew near again to his victim. The elephant, shaking with fury, tugged at his fastenings and bawled his hatred. The scout eyed him, shifting the grip of his spear.

At that moment Mago, watching from his horse on the knoll by his brother, saw a boy running toward the scout. Recognizing him for the absent interpreter's son, one of the bare half dozen boys with the expedition, he realized the situation and put spurs to his horse. Both the skulking mahout and the intent scout were unaware equally of the racing boy and of the hurrying general. The scout watched his chance, avoided the swaying trunk and drove his spear point through the long, tattered flap of the elephant's forward-held left ear. The brute shrieked with pain, impotent rage and outraged pride. As the spear head tore sideways from the bleeding ear the boy yelled out, "You are hurting my elephant!" dashed past the animal, leaped at the scout and wound his arms and legs about him.

The unforeseen onset pushed him still further from his victim. Hannibal was so staggered by the unexpected attack that he lurched back, and, strong man as he was, could not instantly free his arms from the boy's wiry grip. He cuffed at the lad's head, and then his hand went to his dagger. He would have slit the boy's throat or stabbed him as automatically and unhesitatingly as he would have crushed a loathsome insect. Before he could draw his dirk Mago was on them. Wrenching his horse round almost in its own length, he reined it back on its haunches and seized the boy's left arm.

"Let him go!" he commanded.

His practised lift, reinforced at just the right instant by his horse's onward movement, tore the boy from the scout and laid him helpless across the horse in front of him.

"Be still, you little fool!" he admonished him. "Do you want to be killed for an elephant?" Wheeling round, he cantered back to the knoll with his prisoner.

"Always your everlasting sentimentalism," growled Hannibal. "Why did you have to interfere?"

"I couldn't see a child killed for his folly," Mago retorted. "Give him a chance."

"We've no room for folly and sentiment on this expedition," said Hannibal sourly. "If he

ever catches my eye again with any such behavior I'll have him put out of the way instantly. I'll tolerate no such weakmindedness."

"Give him a chance," Mago repeated.

"Tie him up, anyhow," his brother ordered.

While two of the orderlies tied the boy hand and foot the scout resumed his tormenting of Barranith. Trunk and spear, never touching, fenced in the air, the elephant shrilling his indignation. Then a second time the javelin tore through the thin flesh of the flapping ear.

"Be warned, lord," the mahout called from his bush. "His strength is as his rage. Anger him yet again and he will tear free."

"Is he angry enough?" the scout inquired.

"Too angry already, lord," the mahout replied.

"Much too angry already."

"Keep back there," the scout called sharply.

"Don't let him see you."

The mahout retreated through the bushes; the scout made a detour about the frenzied elephant and joined the mahout.

They walked to where Hannibal's horse was held by one of his underlings.

"Did he see you?" the scout inquired.

"Perhaps," the mahout answered doubtfully, "certainly he heard me."

"Does he blame you?" Hannibal went on.

"If he does," said the mahout resignedly, "he

will assuredly kill me. If he does not kill me you will know that he does not blame me. I think he blames only you."

"Will he remember me?" the scout demanded.

"As long as he lives he will remember you. If you go near him again you are a dead man."

"Will he chase me?" Hannibal pursued.

"That will he," the mahout ejaculated; "to the ends of the world will he pursue."

"How far off am I safe?" the scout continued.

"Only when out of his sight," the mahout affirmed, "and an elephant can see further than men would believe."

"Would he recognize me across the river?" Hannibal concluded.

"Yea," asserted the mahout, "and twice as far. He will know; he will not forget."

The head mahout had joined them while they talked. To him the scout turned. He had assumed his intensest air of command.

"Now attend to me!" he ordered. "When I am out of sight quiet this elephant. As soon as you think it safe remove his fetters, except one shackle. Bring up the others and have them lined up three or four to right and left of him, and the rest in the rear of the foremost row. Arrange them so that their formation is deeper than it is wide, and those in the rear can see as little as possible of what is going on ahead

of them. Choose for the front row the tallest elephants, and among them those at once promptest to obey and most easily excited. Have the mahouts mounted and ready with their goads. When all is prepared signal to my men on the further bank. When Barranith enters the river urge on the elephants; they will follow."

"Truly, lord," said the head mahout, "your words are wise. You surpass us at our own trade."

The scout swung himself into his saddle, drove his heels into his pony and galloped off up stream, his tatterdemalion escort following in their usual haphazard fashion.

Barranith's mahout gingerly approached him. The elephant was rocking from side to side, rumbling and whining piteously, the big tears streaming from his eyes. He did not grow angry at sight of his driver, but he did not quiet down, either.

From the knoll Hannibal, Mago and their escort surveyed the scene. Behind them the boy had struggled into a sitting posture. He peered between the legs of the horses.

"Let me go," he begged. "Let me go comfort my elephant."

"May I cut him loose?" Mago asked Hannibal. "It can do no harm now."

"I've a mind to have him speared for a nuisance," Hannibal growled.

"Oh, give him a chance," Mago reiterated for the third time. His face wore its kindly, compelling smile. Hannibal grunted an assent. Mago signed to one of the orderlies. He drew his dagger, cut the cords and in an instant the boy was scudding down the hill. He dashed in front of the elephant and began to coo to him, fondle him and pat him. Barranith stopped his woeful noises, ceased his rocking and responded to the boy's caresses. The mahout left the boy and elephant together and fetched water from the river. He and the boy washed Barranith's ear. The brute was then sufficiently quieted for the mahout to remove all the chains except one to each hind leg. Barranith was still shedding occasional tears and moaning over the indignity he had suffered, yet he felt himself in the hands of friends and his bad tempered little eyes roved over the prospect without catching sight of anything that irritated him. The elephants were being ranged in rows beside Barranith and behind him. Next him on his right was the tallest elephant, and aloft upon it the head mahout alternately viewed the proceedings of his subordinates and scanned the further bank of the river. Most of the bushes near the bank had been broken and tramped flat in the passage of

men and animals. Just opposite two clumps were left at the lip of the steep bank, and beyond them was a gentle slope clear of trees for a dozen yards. The scout's escort of mounted Numidians and half-naked Mauretanian runners emerged from the woods on the left. The runners were spearmen and swordsmen; the spearmen carried with miraculous ease their amazing twenty-four foot lances, with heads shaped like smilax leaves, three feet long and sharp as razors all round; the swordsmen carried their equally amazing Tingitanian two-handed swords, four feet long, straight, two-edged and with great cross guards at the hilt. Four approached the two clumps of bushes; two, one swordsman and one spearman, hid in each clump. Then the lean man on the white pony stood up in his stirrups and waved his hand. His shout reached the head mahout. He looked behind him, swept a glance over the serried elephants, called a question, gave two guttural orders and then in his turn stood up, gestured and shouted.

Two ponies dashed out of the woods, one ridden by a Numidian nondescript, the other, a roan, carrying a figure cloaked to the eyes. They reached the top of the bank between the clumps of scrub, and then the swathed figure swung off the roan pony, shed one cloak after another till he had handed five to his companion, who

promptly spurred away, carrying the cloaks and leading the roan pony.

Hannibal the Scout stood unhelmeted and unbooted, bareheaded and barefooted, clad only in his waist cloth, at the top of the bank.

Scarcely had he shed the last cloak when Barranith trumpeted. Hannibal the Scout danced on the edge of the river bank, waved his arms and yelled. Again Barranith trumpeted and all the herd took it up. In the silence following this outburst Mago and Hannibal heard the snap, snap of Barranith's leg chains. Again he trumpeted, again the herd reinforced his defiant outburst. Mago and Hannibal, watching intently, caught a momentary glimpse of Barranith's broad rump silhouetted against the yellow surgings of the river as he tilted down the bank. The herd heaved behind him, he trumpeted a third time and surged forward, the mahouts plying their hooked goads. Down the bank they slid and into the river, till its yellow water was spotted with erect mahouts, each with a trunk held aloft and part of a gray head visible before him and part of an unsubmerged gray back behind him. Hannibal the Scout danced and gesticulated on the bank. Barranith, without any mahout astride his back, swam two lengths before the other elephants. As he reached the bank and began to struggle up it Hannibal the

Scout looked over the edge, gave a last teasing yell and then turned and fled for his life. As he turned, as Barranith toiled up the yielding bank, the four Africans, two above and two below, began to sneak out of their clumps of bush. When he had his head above the bank, had caught sight of the scout running toward the forest and was making his last spasmodic effort to reach the level above, as they felt sure of his ignoring them, they crawled toward him, clinging to the slippery face of the bluff. Below and behind him they neared him just as he gained sure foothold. Before he could make the first stride of his pursuit Mago and Hannibal, watching from across the river, saw the two big Mauretanian swords flash to right and left of him, saw him sink down like a hamstrung horse, saw the long spears thrust home. The four men scampered away to right and left as the herd behind began to breast the bank, their mahouts yelling and pounding them with the spiky goads.

"Baal be thanked!" said Hannibal, "they will make it."

"Baal nothing," Mago snorted, "Hannibal be thanked! You could have prayed to Baal till next summer and they still be on this side. Your scout did it."

"Like enough he is praying to Baal yet," Han-

nibal rejoined, "and he will not lose one in the river. None is being swept down."

Mago scanned the turbid surface.

"Look there!" he exclaimed, pointing below the herd, now more than half across. Two heads bobbed in the current. They watched them till they gained the banks. Barranith's mahout was one and the boy the other.

"If that little idiot makes any more fuss I'll have him thrown back into the river," said Hannibal savagely.

"Give him a chance," said Mago for the fourth time.

"Where a boy can swim there can I," said Hannibal without replying.

"Don't you venture it," his brother protested. "If we lose you we are all dead men together. Cross in a boat."

"Example counts," snapped Hannibal, "I swim. As for you, off with you. Now is your chance for one of your favorite rear guard actions. Send me all the divisions except your own as promptly as you can. Don't lose more men than you need lose. Take Gisgo and Hasdrubal. I keep the rest."

The two young nobles he designated followed Mago away from the river, the rest followed Hannibal toward it.

As the last elephant scaled the further bank

Hannibal spurred his horse into the yellow current, his escort beside and behind him. When they topped the further bank nothing living was in sight save a gray faced Hindoo and a sobbing lad sitting huddled by Barranith's carcass. Hannibal gave but one glance at them and spurred his horse past them into the forest.



THE FASCES



THE FASCES

I

Cneius Pompeius minantibus direpturos pecuniam militibus, quam in triumpho ferretur . . . adfirmavit . . . se potius et moriturum, quam licentiae militum succumberet, castigatisque oratione gravi laureatos fasces objecit, ut ab illorum inciperent direptione: eaque invidia redegit eos ad modestiam.

Julius Frontinus, STRATEGEMATICON, IV, V, I.

F AINT and blurred, but unescapable, the vast hum from the roaring early-morning activity of Rome reached their ears above and through all nearer sounds. About them the bustle and hurry of the camp, its clatter and rattle, its buzz and drone, enveloped them with insistent noise. Yet the two women faced each other with a mute hostility so tensely silent that the spiritual hush inside the tent seemed an immense stillness pervading all the world. Except their own and each other's breathing they heard nothing.

Through the entrance of the tent, past the edges of its drawn-up flaps, they could see, on either side, an elbow of an immobile sentinel. But the two sentries might have been of bronze for all the two women noted them or thought

of them. They felt alone and they were alone, for across the whole width of the big, gorgeous tent they were out of earshot of the guards.

They gazed at each other for some moments.

Pompeia spoke first:

"There is no need," she said, "to tell you how astonished I am to see you here. To say how much I disapprove would be waste of breath."

"Your assumption that I care nothing for your approbation," Mucia replied haughtily, "is as baseless as it is undeserved. I have always striven to win your approval. Your behavior and your utterances to-day are but one more instance of your determination to find fault with everything I do, to pick flaws in anything.

"Your surprise at my being here is natural, but your censure I do not deserve. I have broken no family law, and surely there is nothing very reprehensible in transgressing a clan-custom which never had any sense in it. Why should I be bound in these progressive times by a narrow-minded adherence to a mere whim of tradition just because all other women of my clan have observed it?"

"Your clan?" Pompeia exclaimed fiercely. "It is no longer your clan. When my brother married you he made you, worse luck, a member of our clan. You are not bound by the customs of any other clan or by the statutes of any other

family, and if you were, nobody except your own blood kin would know or care. Nobody pays any attention to such things. No more do I. You know well that is not why I am incensed."

"If not, then why, in Castor's name?" Mucia queried amazedly.

"It should be unnecessary," said Pompeia coldly, "and it is probably useless, to point out to you the indelicacy of driving out here in a closed carriage with a man who is not your husband. You must have started long before daybreak."

"It seems to escape you," Mucia retorted indignantly, "that you have yourself done precisely the same thing."

"Not precisely nor nearly," Pompeia argued hotly. "I am a widow. I came with my cousin, who grew up with me and whom no one has ever suspected of being an admirer or gallant of mine. Your escort was a man wholly unrelated to you in any way, whose attentions to you have been the talk of Rome for a year."

"Clodius," Mucia disclaimed, "is my husband's friend."

"Clodius," Pompeia rejoined, "is nobody's friend. He is his own worst enemy; his country's worst enemy; your worst enemy, if you but knew it; and beyond peradventure, your husband's worst enemy."

"You are blinded," Mucia sneered, "by your own sour, vinegary spirit. Your bile and spleen miscolor all the world for you. Clodius has his faults, but he is far from being as bad as you make him out. He could appear such only to one blinded by mere gall."

"I may be blinded by anything you choose," said Pompeia fiercely, "by the worst quality your hatred can think up to accuse me of, but at the worst you can make me out, I would be far better than the bad wife of a good husband blinded by an unholy love for another man."

Mucia looked unaffectedly shocked.

"Can even your malice and venom imagine," she cried, "that I could be in love with Clodius?"

"Everybody thinks so," Pompeia told her, triumphantly, "all Rome is sure of it."

"I don't believe a word of it," Mucia exclaimed. "Because you hate me you want to think the worst of me, and because you credit anything, however improbable, you persuade yourself that all Rome believes what your malignity conjectures. The idea! Pompey is the handsomest, the kindest, the most fascinating, the most agreeable, the most popular, the most successful, the greatest man the world has ever seen. The idea of me, who am lucky enough to be his wife, so much as thinking of

any other man, absurd! and you know it is absurd!"

The aversion all vanished from Pompeia's handsome, domineering countenance. She gazed at her beautiful sister-in-law with a sort of impersonal fascinated interest.

"Really Mucia," she asked, in a tone entirely inoffensive, wholly disarming, "do you truly care nothing for Clodius? Do you believe in your heart you care nothing for him and everything for Pompey?"

"Truthfully," said Mucia simply, "I do."

"And do you really believe that Clodius is Pompey's friend, showing you attentions for your husband's sake only?"

"I genuinely do," Mucia affirmed sincerely.

"I feel, somehow," Pompeia admitted, with an expression of wonderment, "that you are telling the truth."

"You could scarcely," Mucia proudly said, "feel anything else."

Pompeia's dark face suddenly flushed and her eyes blazed.

"You dolt," she exploded, "almost anyone would believe the exact reverse. And I believe you against my will and against my wish. I have never liked you, as you well know, and as I have never concealed. I began by seeing you frivolous and light-headed, I went on to think

you flighty and capricious. Later I made sure you were vain and reckless. At last I judged you cynically shameless. I hated you all the while. But I wronged you, I deceived myself. You never deserved hatred; you are not worth hating, you are not a bad woman, you are worse. You are a fool. I hate you no longer, I despise you!"

The fury of the outburst dazed Mucia and her face showed it.

"O, I've no patience with you," Pompeia went on, "to be so shallow, so easy a dupe. Clodius has never been actuated by any motive but self-seeking. Out of that grew envy of Pompey. Pompey has never said or done anything that could give Clodius a chance to injure him, has never made any mistake in war or politics, Clodius has watched in vain for an opportunity, for a pretext against him. Once Pompey was off for the East and you left behind he naturally cast his eyes on you, and schemed to hurt or injure or discredit Pompey through you. When he found himself kept away from you by Caesar, he plotted to smirch you with innuendoes about Caesar's relations to you. You were silly enough to act so as to lay yourself open to his slanders and to come near disgrace from pure unthinking folly.

"Then, when Caesar avoided you in disgust,

Clodius laid siege to you and you fell into his trap at once and more and more. Everybody but you sees through him. Everybody knows he cares nothing for you. Everybody sees what he is trying to do, what he has been doing. Day by day he has alienated you from your husband and ingratiated himself with you, till you echo his thoughts and words as an adoring bride does her bridegroom's utterances. Everybody in Rome can see it but you. And you lend yourself to his plans, let him lead you on to humiliate the family and help him compass Pompey's ruin, and never see what is going on. Oh, you incalculable fool!"

Pompeia stopped for mere lack of breath.

Mucia, pale and wrathful, spoke slowly and contemptuously.

"It is astonishing," she said, "how you very good women, who radiate virtue from every pore and make righteousness a profession and rectitude an art, can descry nothing but wickedness or folly wherever you look, can view nothing but evil anywhere. Your habit of censorious criticism becomes a bias of spiteful malignity and prevents your seeing clearly or thinking rationally. There is not an approach to truth in anything you say."

"Is there not?" Pompeia began again. "Do I not see clear? Do I not see that you are merely

a simpleton? All Rome else believes that you are in the plot, that you have abetted Clodius to devise this threatened mutiny, that you have come out to your husband's camp to-day, as all Rome predicted days and days ago that you would come, to behold the outburst of the mutineers and gloat with your lover over your husband's discomfiture."

"Pompeia," Mucia said solemnly and with conviction, "you are surely insane. I know of no plot. What is this talk of mutiny? The daughter of Pompeius Strabo should not speak lightly of mutinies. Are your wits diseased? Is this a delusion of your own? Have you imagined mutiny impending? Or is there really anything behind what you say? If you are in your senses, let me hear you talk sensibly."

"I am talking sensibly," Pompeia protested. "From the day the army began to disembark at Brundisium, Clodius has had his agents among the men. They inflamed the soldiers' cupidity with exaggerated accounts of the value of the booty brought home, set them calculating the probable amount each one would receive and then, when they were busy with anticipations of how they would spend their prospective wealth, the rumor was spread about that Pompey would turn the entire spoil into the treasury and the men get nothing but their bare pay. They

feel defrauded already. When Pompey announces how much is to go to the treasury and how little to the men, as he will to-day, they will feel robbed and are likely to break all restraints. That is Clodius' calculation."

"This is a tissue of absurdities," Mucia exclaimed.

"I knew you would not believe me," Pompeia breathed wearily. "I knew it would be useless to talk with you."

"I do not credit a syllable of what you say of Clodius," Mucia answered, "all the more since I know the falsity of your aspersions upon me. But you forget how much I love my husband. I have little faith in your wild talk of mutiny planned. But I am ready to oppose the most phantasmal shadow of any danger to Pompey as vehemently as if it were a tangible reality, a dreadful certainty."

"It is a certainty," Pompeia averred.

"I will not ask you," Mucia went on, "how you came to believe all this or where you heard it. But thinking you knew it you must have told Pompey. If warned he can easily provide against any danger."

"That is just what he will not do," Pompeia declared. "I might as well have been Cassandra of Troy pleading with Hector."

"What did he say?" Mucia asked.

"‘Sister,’ he said, Pompeia replied, ‘our father’s grave is a witness that any army, if misunderstood and mismanaged, may mutiny, however causelessly and unexpectedly, and that when they have once transgressed discipline the men may go to any length. But I never fail to understand and to manage my men.’ That is what he said, then what could I say?”

“Obviously nothing,” Mucia agreed, “and more than likely he is quite right and would foresee any such danger as you imagine long before you or any one else could hear of it.”

At that moment they became aware of the sound of many feet approaching, not the footsteps of casual passers-by, not the tramp of soldiers in rank, but the noise of men walking together. The two women ceased to look at each other and faced the entrance of the pavilion.

II

The two sentinels wheeled stiffly to face each other, presented arms and stood at the salute. Between them a tall, well-knit man strode springily into the tent.

Mucia gave a little cry, ran to him and threw her arms about his neck. He started in surprise and then caught her to him. She fairly hung

upon him, laying her face to his, kissing him again and again, and between tears and laughter repeating:

"Five years, Cneius, five years!"

He said nothing. When her transports slackened, he gently disengaged himself from her caresses. Holding her hands in his, he kissed her gravely, as an indulgent uncle might salute his niece, without warmth and as a sort of matter of routine.

"This is indeed a surprise," he said, "and the greatest pleasure of my homecoming. I feel greatly honored."

"And you do not disapprove?" she queried, half timidly.

His self-contained calmness, his total lack of any loverly ardor, his obvious preoccupation with other thoughts, piqued and displeased her.

"Certainly I approve of your coming," he told her, "but I am still astonished. Why did you come?"

"Chiefly because I wanted to see you," Mucia answered, adding with a sudden brilliant inspiration of solicitous mendacity, "and particularly to warn you that there are rumors of dexterous and well-laid plans to foment a mutiny which is expected to break out this very day."

Pompey laughed gently and softly, but he

laughed. He still held Mucia's hands, holding her away from him and looking down at her.

Pompeia, withdrawn the width of the tent, gazing from under her raven-black hair, her brown eyes wide in her proud swarthy face, not only admired her brother, but confessed to herself that they were a well-matched, well-looking pair. He was very handsome; bareheaded, after the Roman fashion; his hair glossy brown, soft and wavy, his face healthily tanned, and ruddy; his eyes a very dark bluish-gray, transparent and bright; around big, black pupils. He was wearing the embossed body-armor of pure gold which the city of Antioch had had made for him, which he had declined, as he refused all gifts everywhere, but which he had so admired, that he bought it from the goldsmiths at its full value. His crimson cloak, fastened by a big emerald brooch on his left shoulder, hung behind him. His bare arms were round and muscular. From under his military kilt of broad leather straps, plated with scales of chased gold, his knees showed brown and sinewy. He wore the half boots of a Roman nobleman, made of crimson chamois leather, with tiny gold crescents dangling by short chains from their tops.

Before him Mucia gazed up at him adoring and rebuffed, her yellow curls rippling down past her flushed, sea-shell cheeks, her pale blue eyes

ready to fill with tears, a lovely figure of a young matron still girlish, palpitating with anxiety, but already dashed by her husband's coolness.

"Why do you laugh?" she pouted.

"People tell me I am the greatest general the world ever knew," he said.

"Your wife knows well that they do," she chimed in, "and proud of it she is."

"You dear little girl!" he exclaimed. "Can you not feel why I laughed? I have lived in camps since I was fourteen. I grew up on incipient mutinies. I deserve as well as I can what men say of me. And you come of a family whose men have been priests and advocates and farmers, but which has never given a general or admiral to the republic, which has so avoided camps, that you are the first woman of your blood to set foot inside one. This is your first hour in a camp and you instruct me how to manage an army! You bring me warnings! Do you wonder that I laughed?"

"You might pay attention to your wife," she pouted.

"Not her warnings, certainly," he said, with an air of finality. "Attention to her I might pay if she had notified me of her coming."

"I wanted to surprise you," she protested.

"You have," he acknowledged, "and so much so that I must forego the pleasure of showing

you over my camp. That would be a rare treat, to show my best-beloved, a woman so appreciative and enthusiastic, what she would see for the first time. I have shown many ladies many camps, but never any to a lady who had never seen one before. I should enjoy it of all things could I watch your pleasure. But all my time is taken up. I could hardly snatch these brief moments with you. I must turn you over to one of my aids."

He led her out of the tent and presented her to his staff. Gabinius, splendid in gilt armor. Labienus, thin-lipped, adequate, envious-eyed, conspicuous in his plain leather corselet; Cato, sour-faced and monosyllabic; Afranius, mild and mellow as a full moon; Petreius, emaciated with fever, but resolutely erect; and a dozen more.

"And you remember Mark Antony," he said presenting a curly-headed, blue-eyed dandy, a trifle too plump. "He shall have the pleasant duty of showing you the camp. You will find him an agreeable guide. And now I must go. Business presses."

In a moment he and all his staff save Antony were gone.

III

Mucia found herself looking up into the very eyes Cleopatra of Egypt was to love so well twenty years later. All women admired Antony and liked him. Mucia liked him.

"You did not remember me really?" he began. "Am I not right?"

"No," she admitted, "I did not."

"No wonder," he agreed. "I went away scarcely more than a boy: I feel every inch a man now as I come home."

"You look it too," Mucia assured him, "and what is more you are."

She understood all the arts of coquetry and not least those by which women no longer young flatter youths. Antony responded to her words and tone. An atmosphere of intimacy enveloped them at once. From within the tent Pompeia glowered unnoticed, unheeded, forgotten.

"Do you really want to go over the camp?" Antony queried. "All camps are alike."

"But I have never seen a camp," Mucia exclaimed.

"Never seen a camp!" Antony echoed. "Do you mean that?"

"I truthfully do," Mucia confirmed.

"How on earth can that be possible," Antony wondered.

"I come of the Scaevolae, you know," Mucia reminded him.

"Oh yes," he drawled, ruminating. "Seems to me I remember that their women must never enter a camp. But I thought of course you'd left all that behind when you married."

"Not till to-day," she exclaimed.

"Showing you about will be a treat indeed," he laughed delightedly.

Mucia, in her interest, walked rapidly, scorning the suggestion of a litter and bearers for her comfort. Antony had never convoyed a lady who made the round of the camp so fast. When their tour was fairly complete she burst out.

"I don't care about so many square feet for so many horses nor anything like that. A camp is fascinating and you are a good showman, but you have shown me everything except what I want to see. I want to see the treasure, the ingots, the coins, the goblets, the vases, the bowls, the statuettes, the tables, the sofas, the rugs, the tapestries, the hangings, the awnings, the embroideries; all they will carry in the triumph. And especially the jewels; the jewels most of all."

"That is the only thing you could ask to see," Antony replied, chapfallen, "which I cannot show you. The treasure is under strict guard

and the orders are unequivocal, to let no one see it."

"Not even the commander's wife?" Mucia pleaded.

"Pompey makes no exceptions and tolerates no transgressions," Antony declared. "No one dare break his rules."

"But even if no one else dare break one," Mucia insinuated, "you might know a way to get round this one quietly."

"Circumventing Pompey," Antony told her, "is likely to be as disastrous as disobeying him. Kind-hearted as he is, bland and deliberate as his habits are, he can be terrifyingly sudden and inflexibly stern on occasions."

"He wouldn't be savage on the eve of a triumph," Mucia wheedled.

"Technically," Antony agreed, "we disbanded at Brundisium and are here informally waiting to march in the celebration. Actually his authority is as autocratic as while we were still under oath and his discipline as exacting. He would not hesitate, I believe, to touch an offender with his baton if he thought the offense grave enough, and the offender would undoubtedly be stoned instantly."

"His hold on the men is good then?" Mucia queried.

"Perfect," Antony affirmed.

Mucia, inwardly self-congratulatory at this refutation of Pompeia's alarms, became altogether irresistible in her fascinations. Antony yielded after a little more talk.

"I'll take the risk," he agreed at last. "But I cannot arrange it at once, nor while you are with me. If you are willing to stay quiet a while in a tent by yourself, I'll find out if it is possible, arrange it if I can and in any case come back quickly to let you know."

"Where must I stay?" Mucia queried. "I am quite willing."

"Here," Antony indicated. "See the sentinels before those six tents, they are reserved for conferences of visiting politicians. If one is empty I'll leave you there safe under guard. No one can know you are there or can disturb you."

He spoke to a saluting sentry, they stepped past him and in a moment Mucia found herself alone in the glimmer of a closed leather tent.

She had barely settled and composed herself for her waiting when she heard talking, evidently in the tent adjoining hers. To begin with she was merely aware of the murmur of two men's voices. Then she made out that they were talking Greek. Then she recognized Clodius' voice. Very much to her own astonishment she felt herself thrill at the sound of it. She had been entirely sincere in talking with Pompeia. She

herself was as far as possible from realizing how completely Clodius had ingratiated himself with her. He had been tactful, deft and unhurried, had never gone too far in word, tone, action or demeanor. She had accepted his attentions without concern because she was wholly absorbed in thinking of her husband. Convinced that she herself idolized Pompey she had thought of him as idolizing her, had pictured him from moment to moment as not only her husband, but as her ardent lover kept away from her by unwelcome duties. She had been wrapt up in her dreams of her ideal. Now that ideal had been displaced by the actuality of a cool, preoccupied and externally indifferent husband, who put her aside mechanically and continued absorbed in his duties, her recollections of the attentions of Clodius came over her, a pleasant throng of memories, of compliments, flatteries and kindnesses.

At first she could only recognize the voice, but could not hear the words, then he spoke louder.

"Crassus," he said. "Can you see a flaw in the arrangements?"

"Not a flaw," Crassus drawled, his fat, suety tones trailing glutinously into each other, "when we sit here and talk it over, it seems that everything has been considered, everything provided for and nothing forgotten."

"We are certain to succeed," Clodius exulted.

"I am not certain by any means," Crassus replied. "You forget the man we are dealing with. Pompey has been in ten thousand tight places. He has always come through safe. Time and time again his enemies have thought they had him. More than once, since I have been pitted against him, I have thought I had him. Just when it seems everything is adverse to him and no loophole of escape possible, he escapes or he turns the whole circle of menaces to his own advantage. He has a way of grasping the entirety of a situation in the twinkling of an eye, of comprehending all the factors better than any one else could and of doing just exactly the right thing, just exactly the one thing no other man alive, no other man that ever lived, could have been capable of conceiving and executing, and it is always the right thing to a hair and he always carries it out without an error. He's the factor which is likely to put all our calculations to naught."

"Whom the gods mean to destroy," Clodius quoted, "they first make mad. The man is insane with self-esteem, with self-confidence. His foolhardy recklessness is going to deliver him into our power tied hand and foot. His success against the fleets of the pirates and the hordes of a dozen sultans has so puffed him up that

he thinks no harm can befall him, that he only has to will anything to have it go as he wishes. He is no longer his old wary self. I have not told you, but I know from reliable sources that he has been advised of our tampering and warned of our plans, has been warned by at least six different individuals. He laughed at them. He refuses to heed. He is deaf and blind. His folly will make us sure to succeed."

"It does look that way, I allow," Crassus admitted grudgingly. "But he may fool us yet. However it turns out you certainly have taken endless pains. You puzzle me, I can't see what you are in this for. I can see what I am to get, what the others are to get, but I can't see what you hope to get."

"I," said Clodius intensely, "hope to get Mucia."

Mucia hearing the passion in his voice, felt an answering tingle in her blood. She realized that the man loved her. All their hours together, all their words together suddenly appeared to her in a new light.

"Mucia," Clodius repeated, his voice dwelling on the name. "Mucia is what I hope to get."

Crassus snorted.

"Why man," he exclaimed. "You've had five years to get her in, with Pompey half a world away, and you've spent most of your time on her

for three. If you haven't got her already, you'll never get her now. And if you could I don't see how a mutiny of his troops will help you."

"Of course you don't see," Clodius retorted. "Neither should I, if I had not been forced to see, and even now I cannot credit my senses. Mucia likes me, likes me so much that I should be sure that any other woman liking me as much loved me completely. Perhaps she does, if I could only make her realize her feelings. But she does not realize them. She delights to be with me, she enjoys my solicitude for her, she accepts all my attentions, but she accepts them as if I were her brother or her father. Off and on I believe she loves me, not for an instant have I believed that she feels that she does. She is walled, towered, bastioned and moated about with her love for Pompey. Not for Pompey as he is, but for what he seems to her. She worships that outward semblance of faultless, impeccable capacity and uprightness which he presents to her as to all the world. Once I show her the fellow as he really is, and she will see what a sham he has always been. He has succeeded all his life because he has succeeded, not from any real strength of character, not from any ability to command success. His life has been a series of dazzling windfalls of luck. He has never wrung success from adversity or

risen superior to disaster. He never will. One failure will be the end of him, and his one failure is not two hours off. At this moment he is the hero who has swept the seas clear of all our enemies, abased our most dangerous foemen, avenged the massacre of our slaughtered countrymen, gathered the vastest treasure any Roman general ever captured and brought home the biggest army that ever claimed a triumph. By sunset he will be only the bungler who permitted the most dangerous mutiny a Roman army ever burst into. Whether they kill him or he survives he will be remembered only as a colossal failure. Either way Mucia will know him for the imitation he is. Either way I get her, for she will realize what it is to be loved by a real man."

"You are not a man," Crassus retorted. "You're a reptile."

"Mind your words, Crassus," Clodius warned him. "You don't want to quarrel with me. Our interests are identical."

"As far as Pompey goes, they are," Crassus admitted. "When I think of his cold scorn I rage."

"You hate him politically," Clodius added, "as much as I hate him personally. To-day is the end of Pompey. His sanctimonious assumption

of perfection comes to an end to-day and we shall have——”

His voice suddenly ceased.

Crassus gave an inarticulate grunt and then both were quiet.

IV

Mucia, listening intently, heard no footsteps nor any human movement, nor yet any stir of a tent-flap. Through the silence following the sudden hushing of the two voices she felt the presence of a third person in the next tent, rather than heard him enter it. She divined a mute interchange of keen glances.

Then Clodius spoke again.

“What brings you here, Caius,” he said, in no tone of inquiry.

“Don’t you dare to call me Caius,” the newcomer rapped out, sharply. “Call me Caesar when you speak to me. You’ve no manner of pretension to any degree of intimacy that would justify your Caiusing me.”

“All right Caesar,” Clodius asserted easily. “No harm done.”

“Harm enough,” Caesar growled, “to be smirched with the stench of your effrontery, you nasty little tadpole. Keep your foul familiarities

for those too low to resent them. Don't you dare to try them on me."

"All right Caesar," Clodius repeated. "No offense intended. You haven't told us why you came, though."

"Nor shall I unless I choose," Caesar replied. "Nor until I choose."

Thereupon Crassus interposed.

"If you won't treat Clodius decently for his own sake," he said, "treat him civilly because he's my friend. Do you hear?"

"I hear," Caesar answered, "and it's little I heed. You can hang all the hay in Italy on your horn, but you can't frighten me. You're like many another sham that's marked dangerous, you scare only the scary. I know you for what you are. You try to make believe you're the bull of the herd and you're nothing but a bogus bull-frog blown up with wind, you great scurfy toad!"

"Come, come Caesar," said Crassus. "You must be in a pretty humor with somebody, but that's no reason for insulting me. Remember that I've paid your debts, financed your election, and that you have me to thank for getting Spain as your province for next year. Be civil."

"I'll be civil or not as I choose," Caesar rejoined. "I'm in a bad humor with just precisely yourself. As for my election and my province,

your cash would never have gotten either for me without my control of votes, and if you paid my debts it was in exchange for votes I swung as you wished, and you thought it a right good investment, too."

"Come, come Caesar," Crassus repeated, "out with what you have to say. I know you quite as well as you know me. You're not a man to waste breath on epithets. Tell us your business here. You never came merely to insult us two."

"Insult you two," Caesar sneered. "Impossible! You're beneath insult. It's a condescension to go through the motions of insulting you. You great pair of fools! I came in specifically to tell you that you can be heard outside. I heard you. I fancy the sentry may have heard you. You could be heard in either adjoining tent. You don't know that they are empty. If you must talk, talk lower."

"No need of that," Crassus replied, "we do know that the nearby tents are empty and the sentries don't understand Greek. If you came here to tell us we talk too loud you may go away again."

"I'll go away when I please," Caesar said sternly, "and you'll listen to me as long as I choose to talk. You babble of Pompey's self-conceit and over confidence. You two are a hundred times worse. You yoke of asses! You

plume yourselves on the scheme you have fostered and are about to hatch out. You are boobies. I'm here to make you see your folly, to persuade you to give up your purposes."

"You are always doing unexpected things, Caesar, and in unexpected ways," Crassus spoke in his tallowy voice. "But this passes belief. Do you really expect to persuade us by misnaming and browbeating us?"

"I am bursting with arguments," Caesar replied.

"You may argue till the Greek Kalends," Crassus affirmed, "but you'll never persuade me to halt now. No conceivable argument could make me forego this chance of pulling down that smug, opinionated, insufferable paragon of a Pompey."

"I tell you," Caesar asserted, "you are a fool. Instead of working against him you ought to make him work with you. Think of the team you and he and I would make. I control the voters, you have more money than any ten men alive and he has the entire army and navy ready to do anything he asks."

(Mucia could almost feel the gesture by which Crassus kept Clodius mute.)

"Instead of plotting to abolish or weaken his hold on the military, you ought to use it. If you ruin him some other man will come up with

whom you can make no arrangement. Through me you can make one with Pompey."

"I have tried over and over to make a dicker with him," Crassus growled. "I've got for my pains nothing but scorn and that cool, exasperating contempt of his. I hate him and I mean to get even with him at any cost. You can't change me."

"Nor me either," Clodius put in.

"Even if each of you," Caesar pursued, "is too blinded by hatred to see your own advantage as it is, you might be alive to considerations of prudence. Starting a mutiny is as easy as starting an avalanche, one rumor is like one rolling stone or sliding snow-wreath. Once under way an avalanche is no more unmanageable than a mutiny. A mutiny can no more be directed than a tempest or an earthquake."

"What's the use of your talking about mutinies to me," Crassus rumbled. "You know about slum-votes and election-trickery, you know nothing about soldiery."

"Just wait till I get to Spain," Caesar bragged. "I'll show you what I know about soldiery. When I come back you'll confess I know how to manage soldiers as well as any man alive."

"That's neither here nor there," Crassus objected. "That's all in your mind. It may prove true, but most likely it is mere dreaming."

You don't know any more about mutinies than I do. Clodius knows all about mutinies, he's engineered three already. They turned out as he forejudged."

"A mutiny in Syria or on the banks of the Euphrates," Caesar argued, "was a very different proposition from a mutiny at the gates of Rome. Before Artaxata you risked one entire army, yourself included, in the face of the enemy. Your plans succeeded, you substituted a timid sluggard for a dashing martinet and a cowardly retreat for a glorious advance. If you had failed you had your chance with the rest of getting home. There was no danger of the mutineers killing more than a fraction of their officers, they were irritated only against Lucullus and his loyal subordinates. You only had to spread a panic against further advance and a demand for a retreat. Once turned homeward all discontent vanished.

"Here, to spite Pompey, you have turned the men against discipline itself, irritated them with all their officers, weakened the hold of their oath upon them, stopped the foundations of patriotism and embittered them against the nobility, against any wealthy family, against Rome itself. What you are risking is neither more nor less than the entire republic, the city and all in it, the whole present and future of Rome. Surely

that is too much risk for mere private revenge."

"Revenge!" Clodius exclaimed. "Talk of revenge to Crassus. Hate drives him. What drives me is love. You can't move me by talking of risks, or of Rome. Not all Rome, not all the Empire, not all the world would be too much to risk to gain Mucia."

"Mucia!" Caesar sneered. "Love! You pose or you misuse words or both. You aren't capable of love and such as you are you do not so much as imagine you love Mucia. Why you are cruising on the offing of half the pretty women in Rome, and you'd tack inshore toward any port not well guarded. You'd be philandering round my wife if you dared and you'd dare if I were not careful and watchful. You love Mucia! You, ready to risk anything, let alone everything for her sake! Nonsense."

"No nonsense," cried Clodius with spirit, "but the plain truth."

Mucia, listening, heard no trace of insincerity in his tone. For her, for the moment, it seemed the plain truth indeed, and a pleasant thing to hear.

"Man, man," said Caesar, "granting that you are in love, have you spark of patriotism left? You've little enough. For your own mean spite and personal profit you ruined between Tigranocerta and Artaxata the most splendid campaign

Romans ever fought. You thought little of patriotism then in your rage against Lucullus, and he your brother-in-law! But here and now cannot anything reach your better feelings? Did Rome escape Hannibal and all the power of Carthage, did Sulla save her from the Samnites twenty years ago, did she barely escape Catiline and his ruffians to be burnt in a mere mutiny and that not spontaneous but stirred up for the sake of a woman? Think of all the blood and tears that have gone to make Rome what she is. Must all be in vain because you are made reckless by a woman's indifference to you?"

"I mean to have Mucia," Clodius replied stubbornly. "To get her I must destroy that sham idol of a husband whom she worships. To do that I'll risk Rome, yes and ten Romes, or the world entire!"

"You two are a pair of lunatics," Caesar sighed.

"I should say," Crassus cut in, "that you, Caesar, are merely an alarmist. You seem to assume that the mutiny is bound to get wholly beyond our control. There is no likelihood of that. Clodius has all his plans well laid."

"What are they?" Caesar queried.

"Do you think it likely," Clodius retorted, "that we would tell you?"

Something in Clodius' tone struck Mucia unpleasantly as he spoke.

"I did not think so till you spoke those words," Caesar rounded on him, "I am certain by your intonation that you have no plan at all."

For a moment silence followed.

"You ninny!" Caesar began again. "You haven't any plan! Crassus, what sort of man are you to be led off by such a shallow fool? If you two cannot be moved by considerations of prudence or of patriotism, you might be alive to the thought of your own safety. Can't you realize that if the soldiers get out of hand you will be among the first men killed?"

"We knew we were risking our lives when we went into this scheme," Crassus affirmed.

"You risked your lives, of course," said Caesar. "But you never foresaw how or how much. I can see it on your faces. I've one more question to ask before I go. Can you stop this thing yet?"

No answer came to Mucia's ears. Again she heard Caesar's voice.

"You cannot! I can see that on your faces, too. You are a pair of fools indeed. You're a laughing stock for gods and men.

"You congratulate yourselves on your astuteness, you preen yourselves over your policy, you fancy you are paying off old scores, gratifying

old grudges and getting even for old slights. You bat-blind idiots, you're worse off than the man in the fable, who dug a pit to snare his enemy, found himself trapped in it and starved to death there; you're worse off than the slave in the old joke who sat on a limb of a tree and sawed it off between himself and the tree trunk. You're in the position of the carpenter in the comedy who lay down drunk to sleep in his own shavings and drowsed off giggling while he set fire to them to spite the saddler next door. You've got up a beautiful plan to discredit Pompey and what does the plan amount to? To ruin him you have arranged to put the city at the mercy of the one thing worse than a plundering army of foreign savages, and that's a frenzied mob of indignant soldiers. You've got up a scheme for the massacre of all the notable families of Rome, men, women and children alike. Incidentally you two are certain to be butchered in the first outbreak, along with every other man of importance who happens to be in camp when the row starts. Yes and all the women visitors too. The soldiers will butcher every lady and gentleman in sight. You two and I will be among the first killed. Yes and Mucia besides."

"A nice mess you've led me into, Clodius," Crassus gloomed.

"You don't mean to say you believe all this?" Clodius exclaimed.

"I do," Crassus snarled, "and so do you. Caesar is right. You've led me by the nose into a trap. This can turn out but in two ways. One way we shall owe our lives to Pompey and shall have increased his prestige enormously, the other way we lose our lives. I see it clear now."

"And you've had enough of Clodius, I conjecture?" Caesar put in.

"More than enough," Crassus assured him. "If I come out of this alive I'll stand in with you on any dicker you arrange. Just now the point is, do you see any way of saving our lives? I can see Clodius is helpless."

"I see none," Caesar stated calmly. "Nor my own for that matter. As for myself I could find a horse and gallop for the horizon, say toward Capua. I might get into the city in time to have my dear ones out of the Porta Salaria before the soldiery burst in on this side. But that would do no good; once the news goes all Italy will rise; the Samnites and the Gauls and the rest will slaughter us Romans everywhere.

"No, I'll stay and see this thing out. It will be worth seeing. I could laugh with my last breath at the folly of you two, you weave a snare for Pompey and the result is that at this instant you two are dead men if Pompey does not save

you. Pompey alone stands between us and death."

"Caesar," said Clodius, and Mucia could hear the shake in his voice—"you do not believe your own words. You never could be so cheerful in the face of death."

"You could not, you insect," Caesar sneered. "I am a man. When I really look on the face of death I shall not blench. I've seen death close a hundred times, as light-heartedly as to-day. Think of the excitement of it. Men get worked up over dice. But what a game this is, Rome the stake and our lives to boot and it all turns on Pompey. This beats chariot-racing for any wager."

Mucia heard a movement behind her and turned around.

"What are you listening to?" Antony asked.

"I was trying to hear what is being said in the next tent," Mucia coolly responded. "There are three men in there, talking excitedly in Greek. But they talk so low that I could not make out a word. At first I thought I knew the voices, but I could not even recognize them. However, listening has passed the time for me. Am I to see the treasure?"

V

Her heart palpitating with conflicting emotions, her mind whirling with antagonistic ideas, Mucia went to her sight-seeing woodenly and numbly. Yet her instincts of coquetry and finesse made her counterfeit a delighted interest which completely deceived Antony.

Inwardly she was torn between loving admiration for Pompey, pique at his coolness, even resentment against him, leaning toward that furious rage for revengefulness which woke so easily in a Roman woman. She was divided between distrust of Clodius and the newly realized fascination he had long exercised upon her. Fearing for her own life alternately woke to frenzied panic and calmed under the spell of exultant confidence in her incomparable husband. Solicitude for his lofty reputation and for him struggled against indignation at his curt ignoring of her attempt of a warning. The black certainty of impending doom surged up and drowned her spirit in despair and then again she told herself she had heard merely the inventions of three politicians talking for effect.

With these and a thousand other contending sensations and thoughts seething within her she kept up her judiciously interested smile, shot her

dazzling glances at the proper moments and gurgled expressions of pleasure which she herself could not hear and knew were successful only by watching Antony's face. She felt ready to faint more than once, yet congratulated herself that her companion perceived nothing wrong.

When he showed her the wagon-loads of jewels, she suddenly forgot all about Caesar and Crassus, Clodius and Pompey, mutinies and intrigues, forgot herself and spoke naturally.

Antony was amazed. She swept away his attempt at reply in a second outburst, which he only half understood.

"You certainly seemed to enjoy the bulk of the treasure," he groped; "why are the jewels such a disappointment?"

"Naturally," Mucia replied, "these coffers of loose pearls and turquoises, of heaped sapphires and rubies, of unset opals and diamonds mean nothing to me. The romance, the glamor was all taken away from these stones when they were torn from their settings. No stories cling to them, no perfume of the past lingers about them. I am ready to burst into tears at the sacrilege. Mithridates had gathered the spoil of a hundred conquests into Amisus, his sixty sultanas had wonderful diadems, necklaces, bracelets and amulets. Every piece had its history. Archelaus

had taken in Sparta all those rings and belts which the tyrant Nabis lavished on his women; and with them the ornaments of his chief wife Pheretime of Barca, the very trappings the first Pheretime wore when the Persians helped her punish the rebels and she tortured them and their wives. From Antioch Tigranes carried off the seven strand necklace the mother of Darius wore when Alexander captured her at Issus. He got the best of that share of Alexander's treasure which Seleucus kept.

"I expected to see all those glorious things and more, and you show me meaningless stones bereft of their souls.

"It was such a silly thing to do! The greater bulk of the wrought jewelry would have made only a trifling difference in transporting it and guarding it. And the authentic, original curios could have auctioned for ten times as much as you will ever sell these bleak pebbles for. Merely that is a pity. But the loss of their associations wrings my heart.

"I am so disappointed. I expected to thrill so at the sight and touch of them. They symbolized the power and majesty of the tyrants and kings and sultans who bestowed them, the glory of their conquests and kingdoms, the beauty of the women who wore them, the dangers and toil and triumph of the campaigns in which they were

won. They would have preserved all that forever. Now it is all lost, gone from them irretrievably."

"Oh, the pity of it!"

"Don't talk to me. I am cheated with heaps of gems where I anticipated seeing the embodiment of the arrogance Rome has abased, of the courage and skill that accomplished so much for Rome, of the power and prestige and glory Rome has won."

Antony looked at her, bright-eyed, ten times handsomer than she had thought him.

"The embodiment!" he exclaimed. "You were never in a camp till to-day? Have you ever seen and touched fasces or standards or an eagle?"

"Fasces I have seen, of course, but never touched," she beamed, catching fire from his enthusiasm. "But I was a child when Pompey returned from Sicily and Africa and triumphed. I never saw an eagle or any standard."

"I should have thought," Antony wondered, "that you would have had Pompey take you to the treasury and show you his fasces and standards and eagles while they were deposited there."

"One never does the sight-seeing that is easiest," Mucia replied. "If I had thought of it I should have put it off, and in fact I never thought of it at all."

"Then," Antony exulted, "I can show you what you want to see, the embodiment of the soul of Rome."

The tent to which he led her was guarded by a detail of brawny self-important giants. Inside it they found a dozen centurions, grizzled veterans every one, scarred, seamed and weather-beaten. Their fierce old eyes glared kindly admiration at her from under their bushy brows, their mouths widened into smiles of a truculent good-nature which made her quake at the thought of fifty thousand such men suddenly frenzied with ferocious indignation. These old warriors were all awkward complaisance tremulously pleased at her presence, but their faces had that odd animality which results from sound teeth shortened by long grinding of gritty bread, an approach of nose and chin very different in its effect from the outcome of toothlessness, but productive of a sort of senile brutality which the grins only accentuated. They had been handling long narrow cases of red leather.

"We are just in time," Antony remarked, "they are taking out the standards for the parade. The soldiers are going to turn out to hear the general's speech."

Mucia shuddered. Everything hinged on that speech. Then the awestruck reverence with which the veterans opened the cases riveted her

attention upon what they contained. From their swathings of fine crimson cloth and delicate white wool padding appeared the standards; each a ten-foot pole of carved wood gilded with gold-leaf all over; shod with a bronze spike below a chased silver rosette, bare for some feet above that; then to the top set close with thick corrugated silver disks, like cups trodden flat by an elephant; topped off by a cross-bar from whose ends hung streamers of crimson silk tipped with tinkling tassels of silver ivy-leaves. The names and numbers of the legions chiseled on the cross-bars, the dates and names of localities embossed on the saucer-shaped disks woke Mucia to palpitating delight in their crowding associations. She overwhelmed Antony with questions which he answered indulgently.

Yes, this was the first standard of the first legion. No, those disks did not recall Pompey's victories, the legion had won them under Lucullus. From the top down the disks commemorated the relief of Cyzicus, the capture of Heracleia, the storming of Sinope, the passage of the Halys, the taking of Amisus, the blockade and entry of Tigranocerta and the storm of Nisibis. Yes, the second standard commemorated Pompey's victories. No, there were no disks for any of the successes against the pirates, he had considered them too easy. They com-

memorated the night victory on the Lycos; the forcing of the Phasis, the storm of Artaxata, the taking of the castles in the Caucasus, and the entry into Jerusalem. So they went over them all, she bubbling delight, he pleased, enjoying her enjoyment, adding to it with brief sketches of battles or anecdotes of sieges and marches, but mostly watching her and talking tolerantly.

This was the eagle of the legion. No, eagles were not always of silver, in fact, they had always been of bronze until Aemilius Paullus had silver eagles made from the Macedonian booty; Scipio plated his silver eagles with gold after he defeated Antiochus of Syria; Pompey was the first commander to have his eagles of solid gold; actually this was the first eagle of cast gold ever made.

"And now," said Antony. "You shall see the fasces."

"The fasces!" Mucia exclaimed. "Has Pompey two sets of fasces?"

"No," Antony answered, "only this one set."

"But how can they be here?" Mucia queried staring at the fasces the centurions were lifting out of their cases, "Are they not being carried before him?"

"Did you see any lictors when you saw him?" Antony suggested.

"I shouldn't have seen or noticed lictors,"

Mucia retorted, "if there had been ten dozen instead of two. I was not looking for lictors. I saw only Pompey."

"There were no lictors preceding him," Antony said simply.

"But why?" she marveled. "How can that be?"

"You see," Antony exclaimed. "Technically we disbanded at Brundisium. Nominally we have not been an army since we came ashore, nor Pompey a general."

"You mean," Mucia panted, "that the men are no longer under oath?"

"Certainly," Antony answered easily. "Not since the day after they disembarked."

"But what holds them together?" Mucia asked wide-eyed and breathing fast, her heart thumping.

"Pompey," was Antony's sufficient reply. "They are gentle as lambs. He is paying the expense of rations and everything else out of the booty account, and the technical irregularity will be overlooked, for it forestalls all chance of the quarrels, fights, stabbings, brawls, affrays, riots, pillaging, robberies and burnings that would certainly occur here and there as the men got to drinking, if they straggled up to Rome afoot, in loose bands without officers. The saving is obvious and great. As it is they have been as

orderly as on campaign, not a squabble or row anywhere. But they are held only by custom, convenience of tenting and messing, their ingrained habits of obedience, the after effects of their oath-bound years and their reverence for Pompey."

Mucia ruminated in silence, choking. Here was an opportunity indeed for plotting an outbreak. Nothing to hold the men but Pompey's personal magnetism, no legal power behind him, no authority lodged in him, no bond between him and the men, no consecration of duty, no curse upon malcontents.

"And that is why the fasces are not carried before him," she quavered, "why no lictors precede him?"

"Just so," Antony agreed, "he could hardly parade the sacred legal symbols of powers he has solemnly surrendered. But the fasces will be displayed, carried behind him on the platform with the standards and eagles when he makes his speech to-day. The men would miss the tokens of command to which they are accustomed, and the violation of the law will be winked at and ignored."

Mucia bent over the fasces, forcing herself to seem interested in these emblems so full of weighty import, the grim bundles of gilded wands bound together with crossed red-leather

thongs, each including a broad-bladed keen-edged axe, silver-mounted and its handle silver-ringed. She bent over them and forced herself to her expected outward semblance and to ask questions. Antony expounded as before.

Yes, these were the very fasces Pompey had assumed in Sicily with Sulla's permission, when he was only twenty-two. The laurel-wreaths were pure gold, the same he had added with Sulla's consent when he returned from Africa and triumphed and his men saluted him as commander. After he returned from Spain the fasces had been in the treasury from the end of his year of office until he set out against the pirates. Yes, the rods were birch, you could see that through the gold leaf if you looked carefully. Corinnos of Rhodes had forged and inlaid and chased the axes and carved their handles. Yes, the tassels of the straps were silk, these were the first silk tassels ever put on fasces, before Pompey they had been of wool only. Could these very rods be used for flogging? Indeed they could and had; many a thief or skulker had been cut to ribbons with them; afterwards the blood was washed off and the rods regilded. And could these very axes behead a man? Actually one or another had been used more than once.

"We were just in time, as I told you," Antony concluded, "here are the bearers come for them."

The two dozen bare-headed, bare-necked lictors, jaunty in their short crimson cloaks, filed in silently, eyeing the lady curiously, nudging each other and whispering that she was the general's wife. As they softly fell in to go the standard bearers edged their way in, received their precious charges from the old centurions, and tramped off behind the lictors.

When they were gone Mucia, bright-eyed and quick-breathing, faced Antony.

"Do you know," she said, "it was not the fasces and standards themselves, not even the eagles, that impressed me most, it was the way the men handled them. No young mother ever hung over her first baby boy more solicitously than those hard-faced old warriors over these cases. No priest ever touched any amulet or Palladium more reverently than they dealt with those standards and fasces and eagles; their battered, gnarled hands grasped and lifted them as delicately as a lady's fingers would her fancy work. The tears came into my eyes to see it."

"You have the right kind of heart," Antony told her delightedly. "You have true sympathy. That is just what I wanted you to see. All the toil and sweat and determination of their marchings and trenchings and waitings, all the grim

resolution that carried them through starvation and sickness, all the hopeless valor of their chums and cronies who died on forlorn hopes and fruitless assaults; all the heart-breaking doubts of night surprises, the furious uncertainties of the crisis of battle, the tumultuous exultation of the moment of victory; all the ecstatic enthusiasm of recognition of their commander's worth in strategy and tactics; all their adoration of his still composure, of his unexpected revelations of insight beyond their comprehension; all that and more, all their successes and hopes they see in their standards. All their army's reputation and prestige and glory is manifest and visible to them in their eagles. And all the majesty and might of Rome, all the accumulated power and authority of her conquests, all the magic of her sway is for them inherent in the fasces. For them the standards are the visible soul of the army, the eagle the living presence of Rome's glory, the fasces the personality of her puissance. They might ignore the holiness of consecrated ground, they might violate a tomb or a temple, they might lay violent hands on the statue of a divinity; before the fasces they are deferential, before the standards they are obsequious, to the eagle they bow in awe. A soldier has often little enough respect for a court or a judge, but the fasces are for him the con-

crete embodiment of right and justice, he would give his life rather than see them dishonored. He might be never so drunk and never so weary, but every fiber of him would wake to energy to protect the standards; he might be so lost and degraded as to kill his own father and mother, but he would hesitate to do wrong to an eagle. I see you comprehend all this. Few women do. It will make you enjoy the assembly all the more. You will realize what is behind Pompey's speech."

Did she not realize? She shook inwardly as she realized it, shook outwardly, almost tottered before she mastered herself into external decorum as she suffered Antony to escort her to the platform.

VI

From the platform of a Roman camp, orders of the day were read, news cried, notifications given, also addresses made to the soldiers by officers or the commander. This platform was in most cases a substantial structure of earth faced and topped with sod, in temporary camps; or in permanent camps with stone, of which it was sometimes entirely constructed, as was the platform toward which Antony conducted Mucia. The rank and file of men were assembling before

it; the centurions, nearly six hundred of them, on either side of it facing the soldiers; upon it stood Pompey, his chief officers on his right, on his left the visiting notabilities, behind him his lictors and the standard bearers. Farther back on the platform, upon its three raised tiers, were massed the officers, the staff and others above the rank of centurion. On Pompey's left, among the visitors, were a dozen or more ladies, Pompeia with them. Mucia noted her, and near by Crassus, Clodius and Caesar. For Antony did not conduct her up to join the rest until he had led her entirely around the platform, so that she might get the men's view of it from in front. Pompey, sweeping his outlook with keen eyes, stood at the edge of the platform, midway of its front. The crimson horsehair crest of his helmet rippled in the breeze, his blue eyes sparkled, his gallant bearing, his golden armor, his crimson cloak and big green shoulder-brooch set him off splendidly. Still more was he set off by the tiers of serried officers behind the standard bearers and lictors. Against the deep azure of the morning sky spread the golden wings of the ten eagles, gleaming in the sun. The masses of gorgeous coloring of the uniforms made a background which would have swallowed up and extinguished almost any other general, but against it Pompey stood out conspicuous, his

ineffaceable distinction making his armor seem more golden, his cloak more crimson than any of those behind him, as his face seemed nobler and his eyes brighter. Mucia admired him unreservedly and her sense of pique at his coolness lessened. She comprehended why Sulla had accorded him his title of "the Great Man;" if at that moment his shoulders bore the whole weight of Rome's destinies he looked fully equal to the load, looked the visible incarnation of the majesty of Rome. Beside him Clodius seemed a poor creature.

Yet Mucia ruefully reflected that appearances were very little likely to avail in the approaching crisis. Clodius looked the shrewder, if the meaner man.

Before Antony went his way to take his place among the younger members of the staff he left Mucia next Pompeia. Looking about she found Caesar on her left between her and Clodius. Clodius did not meet her eye. Crassus behind him looked pasty and mottled.

Caesar had hitched his belt askew into that rakish position, the habit of which had made him so conspicuous as a lad. He seemed to Mucia masking a cynical bravado under an inscrutable air of rollicking jauntiness. Pompeia gloomed darkly, tense and over-wrought.

The centurions had flowed round in a crescent

and stood facing the platform leaving a few yards of ground bare before it. Behind them was a jam of the rank and file, armed and helmeted as for review, but collected like any crowd without formation. They were ominously silent. Their one cheer was lifeless. Pompey began his speech as lifelessly. As she listened to his cold, formal periods Mucia wondered was he really the sham Clodius made him out. The men, she could see, listened without enthusiasm as he frigidly enumerated those names of victories which, if glowingly delivered, should have roused his auditors to a frenzy of ardor. Clearly he spoke and audible to the last man at the rear of the listening thousands, but his utterance, precise, almost mincing in its exactness, carried no warmth.

The senate had graciously acceded to their request for a triumph. They were to be accorded full measure of recognition for their valor and their success.

There were to be two separate processions on succeeding days. The first day would commemorate the annihilation of the pirates. The army would act as escort only. The second day would celebrate all the land victories. The spoil . . . (at the mention of the spoil Mucia felt the strained attention of the men, their readiness to take offense), the spoil would be displayed

on sixteen hundred wagons. It would be deposited entire in the treasury. Each man would be paid his allotted stipend at once and in addition in place of any division of booty, would receive the amount of two years' wages, paid in silver.

At that word the storm burst. The roar of the angry men drowned Pompey's voice and swelled into a tide of sound that seemed capable of drowning all the noises in the world. It lasted on, roar following roar in pulsations, blent into one unbroken cataract of noise. All the men were gesticulating and here and there a naked sword flashed aloft above the mob. The tossing sea of waving arms and contorted faces made a terrible spectacle. Mucia realized instantly the fatuity of Clodius and Caesar's unerring prescience. She knew her last hour had come, unless Pompey was strong to save. She knew that upon him hung, not only her life but the lives of all those about her, that upon him depended the salvation of Rome and of all the Roman world. She realized how imbecile had been any pretensions of Clodius towards keeping in hand and guiding the tempest he had aroused. She had a staggering prophetic vision of what the platform she stood on might look like at sunset, her draggled corpse among others heaped pell-mell. Equally clear did she behold the im-

pending horrors of Rome pillaged, burning, then obliterated forever.

In all this instantaneous realization of threatening doom she did not lose her composure. The Romans were an amazingly excitable race, quick to yield to any passion, and by no means controlled in the outward expression of their feelings. Their women screamed easily, their men, even in public, commonly burst into tears, even multitudes of them together, upon provocation that would move no Teutonic or Saxon crowd to any exhibition of emotion whatever. Contradictorily they were extremely capable of self control in respect to anything infringing their idea of dignity. The nobility especially valued a dignified exterior above all the other possessions of their souls. Mucia came of a family believed to be descended from an ancestor capable of thrusting his right hand into a fire and holding it there unflinchingly till it charred. She lived up to her family traditions in general. Now she did not shriek or faint. She was of that blood which bred those contained matrons whose poise and serenity we may still view mirrored forever on the faces of such portrait statues as have come down to us. She had not their height or majesty of form, she had the Roman soul of the tallest of them. Inwardly overwhelmed with dread, she coolly took in the

situation. She had had her eyes on Pompey's face and she saw him for one heart-beat thunder-struck with astonishment, saw that he had anticipated no such situation, saw him wholly unprepared to deal with it.

The sea of faces before her heaved like a whirlpool. The next breath it might become an irresistible torrent of utter destruction. There would be one chance against it and only one.

The women about her she saw as unperturbed as herself, true to their ideals of demeanor. Yet their impassive countenances were deathly white every one.

On the faces of the more comprehending men she read dazed terror; Crassus was blotched and speckled with hues of fright, Clodius was gray with the fear of death; Caesar clothed in cynical patrician effrontery gazed unmoved at the riot, cast a glance of amused contempt at Clodius and fixed expectant eyes on Pompey.

Mucia's followed his. She had borne up in spirit against her inward shudders at the men's outburst, now she nearly fainted under the hot wave of reassurance that surged through her.

Pompey's face was the face of the practised fencer who knows his own skill, knows just what he means to do and confidently waits his certain opportunity.

The roar for gold, gold, gold filled the air.

The first syllable of "aurum" pulsed in a "wow," "wow," "wow" like the snarl of a horde of ravening wild beasts. Ravening wild beasts the men would be next instant unless Pompey saved the situation. Calmly and resolutely he faced them until they hushed from mere breathlessness.

Then his voice rang out, clear, magnetic, full of resonance and fire.

"You want gold?"

Again the roar, the harsh, hoarse, rasping roar of fifty thousand angry fighters, again he waited for it to die down.

"You want gold?" he repeated.

The roar redoubled and through its continuance Pompey's face was not that of a man baffled and defeated, not that of one in a quandary, it was the face of a capable man seeing his opportunity and rising to grasp it. It was not the face of one who doubts or fears. It wore the expression of the man who comprehends his countrymen to the recesses of their souls, knows all the modulations of their heart-strings, understands a situation in all its complexities and means to do the one thing sure to touch the right chord.

Silence fell again, not so much now that the men were breathless as that those in front felt the compulsion of Pompey's magnetic gaze,

those not so far off yielded to the spell of his masterful attitude, and the thrill of their submission communicated itself to the entire throng.

Transfigured and sublime, his presence thralling the whole vast concourse, he stepped back half a pace. With each hand he seized the fasces from the nearest lictor to right and left of him. To the earth before the platform he hurled them. Through the stunned silence his voice bugled:

"If you want gold, begin on that: . . . or that!"

The stillness became as if no breathing thing but himself existed. Stepping back again he seized the two standards of the fourth legion.

"Or on that!" he called as he hurled the first, "or on that!" as he hurled the second.

Across the dazed hush his clarion voice carried far.

"Think what you are doing. The gold I shall turn into the treasury is no more yours to covet than the bullion on the fasces, the metal of your standards, or the gold of the eagles."

He seized and hurled the great gold eagle of the seventh legion.

"If you must and will have gold," he called, "begin on that!"

The tension snapped. A tenfold roar effaced the brief silence. It was a roar of weeping men, abashed, abased, brought back to their senses,

those behind trampling those before as they surged forward. From the dust they lifted their desecrated standards, their eagle, the dread fasces. Tenderly they brushed them. On their knees they begged for pardon, with streaming eyes and babbling tongues choked by sobs they proffered unalterable fealty.

When the tumult slackened Pompey held up one hand. Every man in whatever attitude he might be was frozen mute. Pompey gave a low-voiced order. The two lictors and the three standard-bearers went down into the crowd, retrieved their precious charges and returned to their places, no other man moving the while.

Mucia looked about her. Crassus she saw, but not Clodius. In fact she never saw him again that near, never at all again to speak to. Caesar's eyes met hers with an expression of relished amusement.

She looked again at Pompey, at the deity who had saved her, had saved Rome.

He surveyed the throng before him.

"Further details of the arrangements will be communicated to you by your centurions," he said. "After the spoil is in the treasury you will be paid your stipends and the amount of *one* year's wages apiece paid in silver."

He paused.

Not a sound did any man make.

"Magnificent," Caesar whispered to Mucia. "Almost too risky, but perfectly successful."

"You will now fall into ranks," Pompey continued to the men. "You will march past. From the march past the whole army will double-quick the six miles to Antium. There you will be allowed one draft of water each. You will then double-quick back to camp."

He paused, and stood imperiously dominating the ensuing silence, completely master.

In Roman civil life, in all state affairs, still more in all military matters women were not supposed to exist. If present they effaced themselves, tolerated maybe, but ignored. But now Mucia rushed to Pompey and threw her arms about his neck.

He caught her to him, not perfunctorily, but greedily. Before all his staff and army he kissed her lips.

Then did the men burst into vast, ringing cheers.

"No danger now," Pompey whispered to Mucia as he released her.

"After that cheer they are mine, heart and soul."

THE SWIMMERS



THE SWIMMERS

Liburni, cum vadosa loca obsedissent, capitibus tantum eminentibus fidem fecerunt hosti alti maris ac triremem, quae eos persequeretur, implicatam vado ceperunt.

Julius Frontinus, STRATEGEMATICON, II, V, 43.

THE inner waiting-room of the imperial palace was just then at its fullest. Togaed senators bulged in creaking armchairs; couriers, gaudy in embroidered habiliments, lounged everywhere. Military-men, fresh from the frontier and uncomfortable in parade-uniforms, fidgeted impatiently. Some of Rome's richest land-owners, ship-owners, or money lenders, fuming hot in their oppressive state-togas, colloqued in low voices. Women were many too, and the rustle of skirts and the flutter of fans pervaded the apartment. There was much moving about, changing of seats and rambling from group to group. The buzz of talk was continuous, but mostly under breath. For an atmosphere of uneasiness pervaded the place. Elated faces, eager for an interview, were few. A rumor had been circulated that the Emperor was out of sorts. An adept might have inferred as much from the demeanor of

the two tall pretorians who guarded the inner door or from the air of the silked and jeweled pages who came and went softly. The difference was subtle, and would have wholly escaped a stranger, but it was real. To the best of his ability neither guard nor any one of the pages gave any sign. There were men present who would have given their weight in gold for a hint as to the form of the Emperor's ill humor: whether it was flaring rage, sullen vindictiveness, or, worst of all, his dreaded ironical blandness. To none was any hint given. They conjectured in vain. But imperial irritation cast a gloom over the assembly. A subdued and anxious gathering they were for the most part.

If the Emperor's wrath might be supposed to threaten any one in particular, his displeasure plainly impended over one alcove, midway of the windows on the side opposite the sun. Its shaded recess was tenanted by a man and two women. They had sat together, almost without stirring, since the first comers were admitted. No one had spoken to them, no one had accosted them, no one had greeted them, even in passing. Those who approached their nook, sheered off at sight of them. The alcoves on either side of theirs were filled with indifferent courtiers, insolently sure of their own standing, without cares, whiling away their time with mere chatter. No

other groups settled near them and those least distant drew away as much as possible. They were ignored with sedulous caution.

The man wore the uniform of a Commodore, but was without sword, scabbard or sword-belt. His blue cloak hung stringily behind him, he sat lifelessly, his broad shoulders stooped over his big sunken chest. His cropped hair had a suggestion of waviness even in its shortness. He should have been handsome had he not seemed so dispirited. His complexion was of a peculiar hue, as it were, of youthful flesh, long tanned by wind and sun, grown pallid for lack of light and air. His attitude could hardly have been more listless, more hopeless. His pale blue eyes had in them no sparkle, no light at all. They stared out of the window over the city roofs glittering in the sun or at walls or floor, unseeing, gazing anywhere except at the young woman who sat by him, holding one of his hands in both of hers. She was a sort of human doll, very graceful, and very pretty, even while in tears, manifestly a pampered beauty who had lived all her life on admiration.

The elaborate arrangement of her lusterless gold hair had been a good deal disturbed. She had reddened her eyes with weeping, and they filled with tears again and again, she dabbing at them ineffectually with a pitiful wad of a

drenched handkerchief. At intervals she gave way to sobbing, leaning against her mother, who half held her, half supported her.

The three had spoken seldom and then in whispers.

"You ought to have let us try, Bassus," the girl moaned. "You ought to have let us try," she reiterated.

"You did right, Corinna," he told her. "It was braver of you. And remember, it was wisest. Anything you might have done would only have sealed my doom. If I have any chance it is only because we have kept silent and made no move."

"But it is so dreadful!" she said, "to get you back after all that nightmare of grief and uncertainty and horror, to watch you recover and then to have to keep silent and remain inactive and see you go to death unhelped! To regain you only to lose you again! Oh, it is too dreadful!"

His face was the face of a man who beheld death close, indeed. But collapsed as he was he made a brave effort.

"Try to think of the brighter side of things," he urged.

"There isn't any brighter side to any of it," she declared.

"Yes there is," he insisted, "at the worst of it he can only order me to death, and I ought

to have died long ago. No man has any right to survive such a fiasco. I should have died with my men."

"Judging from your wounds," Corinna's mother put in, "you tried hard enough!"

"I did indeed!" he ejaculated, "and that is some comfort. And if I die now there are other comforts. For me death will be better than degradation, than living on in contempt, out of service and despised."

"We could be married at once," Corinna sobbed, "and live all our lives at Sirmio. What could be lovelier than that? What would disgrace and shame matter there together?"

"I could not be happy, sweetheart," he said gently, "even there, even with you, if I were dishonored."

"If you had let me do as I wanted," she insisted, "you might have been vindicated."

"There can be no exoneration," Bassus maintained, sadly, "no extenuation even, for a commander who loses a whole squadron of warships to an inferior enemy and is himself the sole survivor. And if there were anything to be said in my favor it would have no weight. I must be made an example of. There is no use trying to deceive our minds. I go to death. My only chance is one of his whims. It is a small chance. Let us hope till the end. But even if death is

a certainty for me, let us not forget what we have to rejoice over."

"Rejoice?" the girl whispered bitterly. "Joy? For us?"

"Rejoice that you have made me glad," he said. "A man has but one life. I have had much joy in mine. My misfortune has brought me more joy than I should have thought possible. I knew I loved you, I was wild with elation at the thought of returning successful and marrying you. But what was that to the joy of knowing that you loved me well enough to cling to me, a failure, an outcast, a prisoner! Your first letter was a joy too great to be described. I thrilled with ecstasy at the thought of your loving me well enough to burden your estates to ransom me!"

"And it was all for nothing," the girl wailed. "If you have to die anyhow."

"Not all for nothing," he argued, "there are deaths and deaths. It is bad enough to have to die young. But to die clean and fed and clothed as a Roman should be is far less terrible than to die as I should have died, racked with fever, starved to a skeleton, slashed with festering wounds, shackled in a vile hovel in the mountains, a sty, dark, noisome, filthy and verminous. You saved me from all that."

"But what use was it," she repeated, "if I must lose you after all."

"Even if I must die now," he said, "I had all the bliss of coming back to life and love under your care. I can go bravely remembering all those delicious hours of solicitude and affection; and you must always remember how much it meant to me, how utterly I reveled in it all."

The inner portal opened and between the immobile guards there staggered out a specter of a general, gray-cheeked, too brow-beaten to hide his condition from the throng. The room fell silent as he tottered through it to the outer portal. After he was gone conversation was even more subdued than before.

Presently a page approached the three in the alcove.

"Bassus?" he queried, curtly.

Bassus stood up.

Regardless of the throng Corinna clung to him, kissing him repeatedly, and sobbing.

"Be brave, dear," he said, gently disengaging her arms from his neck. "A scene can only worsen my slender chances. Be brave. Goodby."

He kissed her gravely once; kissed her mother, pressed a hand of each, and followed the page.

In the small private-audience room Bassus found an Emperor not irate nor glum, nor sar-

castic, but plainly and unaffectedly ill in body, haggard and worn with worry, weary in mind and weighed down in spirit with care and disappointments. He was leaning back in a deep armchair upholstered in green leather, against which his face showed also an almost greenish tinge. His neck was scrawny and stringy to the edge of the dark crimson, elaborately embroidered robe which wrapped him about to his ankles. His feet were on a hassock and the gold thread eagles worked on his light blue shoes showed conspicuously. There was a low backless chair beside him.

He looked at Bassus with no symptom of his dreaded dissimulation, but openly wrathful in expression, his eyes glaring, one just visible across the bridge of his hooked nose.

He spoke harshly.

"Are you well enough to talk to me? Mind, I won't be bothered with any more unrepaired wrecks. If you need nursing go back and get well."

"I am entirely myself again," Bassus asserted.

"Sit down," the Emperor commanded, motioning to the low chair beside him. "No, don't hesitate, sit down!"

Bassus, bowing deeply in silence, obeyed.

The Emperor glowered at him.

"I am cursed with bunglers everywhere," he said.

"I am one of them!" Bassus admitted. "I know it. I was surprised at your sending for me."

"I suppose," the Emperor ruminated peevishly, "I should have sent you word to make away with yourself. I didn't want to see you or to talk with you. But I need some of the information you might give me for the benefit of the next man who is to try where you failed and then——"

He broke off and fidgeted fretfully.

"I'm ashamed of it," he went on, "but I am consumed with curiosity to know by what recondite imbecility you arranged for such a complete disaster."

Bassus sat silent.

"So I sent for you," the Emperor concluded.

"Thank you, Sir," Bassus said respectfully.

"Now you are here," the Emperor demanded, "what have you to say for yourself?"

"Nothing," Bassus replied simply.

"This is your last chance!" the Emperor admonished him.

"Why say anything?" Bassus gloomed. "You know all the facts, you have made up your mind!"

"Assumption of disfavor," the Emperor told

him, "is sometimes as foolish as assumption of favor. And you err. I have not all the facts and my mind is not made up. Speak out."

"If I knew what you think you do not know," Bassus began.

"I do not know," the Emperor cut in, "whether Vespillo behaved as a cowardly subordinate to you or as a prudent husband of his own ship."

"No fault can be found with Vespillo," Bassus told him straightforwardly. "Frankly I believe he hated me and was glad to see me in trouble, but he did exactly what he should have done. If he had attempted to come to our rescue he would have lost his own ship to a certainty. Nothing he could have done could have helped us a particle."

The Emperor's yellow gray face became almost animated, almost flushed.

"Pollux!" he exclaimed. "There comes the puzzle of it again! How could you lose five men-of-war at once and to a horde of naked pirates? You were supposed to have an overwhelming force at your command, and you get gobbled up like a sausage by a mastiff. Explain! Tell me your story, man, come closer."

Bassus hitched his chair sideways and leaned over.

"I knew they had gathered a big flotilla at Toluca," he began, "a bigger flotilla than they

had ever before got together. I knew they were planning some more outrageous venture, farther than they had ever raided and for a greater prize most likely. I judged them elated and rash and thought it the right time for a surprise. There were no better triremes afloat than my six and they were in perfect condition to the last spike, to the last rope. My rowers were all sturdy men and they were well fed and fresh. I trusted all my commanders absolutely, except Vespillo, and I knew he would do his plain duty, though he might trick me on any ambiguous order. The weather suited us. There was no high wind, but favorable breezes all the while, with much fog and rain, so that we had every chance of approaching unseen. We actually sighted not one vessel all the way up to Mexa. There we anchored in the seaward harbor. The scouts and our other friendlies uniformly reported no signs of wariness at Toluca, but much roistering and recklessness. Meanwhile it poured rain in torrents, yet our measures kept all the men healthy and everything ready.

"The second night after our anchoring it stopped raining and fell dead calm. We could hear the roaring of the uncountable brooks tearing down the sides of the mountains back of Mexa all over the island. About midnight it cleared, with a fine booming wind. I had the

hawsers buoyed out ready on the instant. Before dawn a fisherboat of one of our friendlies brought word that the flotilla was coming out. We slipped our cables and were off, round the south end of Mexa and straight before the wind for Berega, which was exactly between us and the mouth of Toluca harbor. We drew up to Berega before it was really light. I knew my gentry relied wholly upon sails and that it was rush or nothing, for of course they could out-distance us before the wind on the open sea, and if they once scattered we could catch only a few in the maze of inlets. So we stored sails, lowered yards and unstepped masts and generally stripped. It was done promptly and we were under way again. As we rounded the north headland of Berega the sun came up over Apson directly ahead. It was as fine a picture as a man ever looked at. The sky all blue without a cloud, except some crimson streamers from the sunrise, Apson black against the redness, its shadow shortening on the sea in front of us, the sea emerald green up at the margin of the yellowish water that fanned out from Toluca harbor, where all the rivers converged their swollen torrents of freshet-mud. Well out on the yellow fan was the flotilla, scudding side on to the wind, as their fashion is; not an oar among

them all. And to the left the slopes of Gifetta, rosy in the sun, overlooking everything."

"You have the localities better than I," the Emperor put in. "I know them only as nameless islands and mountains. Go on."

"The flotilla was in a sort of crescent formation, bulged toward us, about two miles from tip to tip and each tip about two miles from the nearest shore. They were all heeling over in our direction, every sail bellying out, every felucca running evenly with every other, a magnificent spectacle.

"The instant they sighted us the most amazing alteration in their movement took place. They seemed seized with a mad panic. The feluccas yawed crazily about, rammed each other, ran together by threes and fours, and hung, held by a jumble of shattered masts, intertangled yards and snarled cordage. Those that ran free zigzagged about, now aback, their lateen sails slatting in the wind, now ducking and scooting this way and that.

"The masthead lookout called that all the crews had jumped overboard at once and were swimming back toward the harbor.

"I judged that we could catch up with them and run them down long before they reached it, and my chief pilot agreed. I had detailed Vespillo to act as a reserve and he had aboard

spare crews and extra marines and all that sort. I signaled him to fall behind, to seize and man all the feluccas worth capturing and to ram or burn the rest at his discretion. Then I signaled the others for battle-front full speed. We gathered way abreast, two of them on each side of me. Through the feluccas we drove, veering aside so as not to be delayed by ramming any. Between the flotilla and the harbor all the water was yellowed by the outrush of the freshets. Across it we could see the swimmers, ten thousand black heads bobbing in the current, not scattered much but swimming in a fairly compact crescent. It looked like an annihilation for the enemy, for they were all of a mile from any beach still, and the current was against them. There was no noise, our crews were quiet and I could hear the time-beaters' gongs on the other triremes ringing sharp and quick in perfect unison with ours. The oars dipped and flashed, we were at top speed, all of twenty miles an hour, and the bobbing heads seemed just where we had first sighted them.

"The current is too much for them,' Euphranor chuckled to me as we stood on the upper platform, 'they are practically stationary.'

"I gave the order, the lookout signaled, and all together the five ships swept round in a wide curve so as to take the strung-out swarm of

swimmers diagonally and drown as many as possible at the first onset. We came among them at terrific speed. I was standing with my feet wide apart and my arms stretched out leaning with both hands braced against the platform bulwark rail. So I was not thrown down like most of the rest, and saw the whole thing. For as we drove into the mass of heads we ran hard and fast aground, all five ships at once. Half the oars snapped, of course, so we were utterly helpless. Nearly every standing man was hurled flat or flung overboard or from his platform to the deck or into the waist. We were in the utmost confusion. Anyhow, as against undisciplined irregulars, we had no boarding netting out, being all for the attack and defense unthought of.

"And as we struck the whole ten thousand savages stood up and yelled."

"Stood up!" the Emperor interjected. "Stood up?"

"Yes, Sir," Bassus went on. "Stood up, not a man of them over knee deep and many not ankle deep!"

"On what?" the Emperor queried, mystified.

"On the bar," Bassus explained. "Mud-flat or sand-bank or whatever it was. You see, the water was all so muddied no one could see the difference between deep and shoal water by color

as in dry weather. The current was far slower than we thought, and not a ripple showed the shallows. Those rascals had been belly flat on the mud, going through the motions of swimming, to trap us."

The Emperor threw back his head and laughed.

"Pollux!" he exclaimed. Then he laughed again, a genuine hearty laugh that lasted long. He wiped his eyes and surveyed Bassus, his expression altered from grim sternness to a tolerant smile.

"The weather helped them," he chuckled. "Everything helped them. They fooled your pilots, they fooled you, they would have fooled me if I had been there, they were wily."

"And brave too," Bassus assured him. "They took their chances which were to be run down. Some were certain to perish as we drove into them, many did. Tanno's ship was on our port quarter as we made our curve, and I could see the heads smash like melons under her cut-water. Yet not a man made any attempt to escape by standing up. They played their game of pretending to swim until we were all aground."

"Yes," said the Emperor, "the scoundrels were brave. But just think of the glee the scamps must have been in, of the hilarity they shook with, their backs barely awash, realizing what was coming."

He laughed again, heartily.

"They had you trapped of course," he said, "and what happened then?"

The commodore's face darkened.

"They yelled again and came at us. They swarmed up the oars, up the sides of the ships, over the bulwarks, like rats, like ants. I had a moment's glimpse of the other ships, each like a bear at bay buried under a pack of dogs. After that one glance I had no eyes except for my own ship, and soon I could see nothing beyond my own sword's length, as long as I could see anything."

"The Ripustians respected you, I gathered," the Emperor remarked.

"They never hinted it to me," Bassus replied with a wry face.

"I inferred," likewise the Emperor pursued, "that they did not treat you any too well."

"Shackles riveted on my ankles," Bassus told him. "Cross bar, between them; chains a plenty. I was about as comfortable as an animal in a cage, no cleaner, and not much better fed."

"You've no love for the Ripustians, that's plain," the Emperor drawled, still smiling.

"Not a bit," said Bassus fervently.

"You'd like to get even with them, I presume?" the Emperor asked.

"Just wouldn't I," Bassus ejaculated.

"I've a notion to let you try again," the Emperor said.

"Sir!" Bassus exclaimed.

"No," said the Emperor. "Don't stand up. Stay where you are. I fancy no man is likely to display more zeal against the Ripustians than you would. And after your experiences I doubt if any man living could be more prudent and wary than you will be. Likewise you are too angry to be timid. You can't raise Euphranor to life again, but you will find one of his family or some other pilot as good. No one will choose pilots or crews or ships better than you and I've a notion I can manage to impress it upon my army and navy that your case will not establish a precedent and that losing a squadron will not assure promotion to any one else. No, no thanks, let me talk. I was a good deal interested in you by Corinna's behavior. After seeing her, still more after listening to her chatter, anyone would have expected her to shrug her shoulders, forget you, and marry anyone convenient within a year. When she besieged her guardians until they mortgaged her estates and ransomed you the gossips were all agog. I heard of it. And then I felt uneasy. I expected her to unleash on me not only all your relations, but her own uncountable, pertinacious clan. Nobody has so much as hinted at intervention in your behalf."

They have let me alone, all of them. They have had the marvelous good sense to pay me the compliment of supposing I can make up my mind rationally for myself. That makes me like Corinna and like you too. I'm going to give you another chance. She deserves you and you deserve her. Did you come here alone?"

"No, Sir," said Bassus simply. "Corinna and her mother came with me."

The Emperor clapped his hands twice.

A page came, was given his orders, and in a moment ushered in Corinna and her mother.

"No," said the Emperor sharply. "No kneeling! No hand-kissing! Sit down, all three of you. I meant to be severe with Bassus, to make an example of him. But he made me laugh! The first real laugh I have had in months. I had a soft spot in my heart for him anyhow. The man who transformed the most fickle and capricious coquette in Rome into a paragon of constancy deserves consideration. He is a marvel. So I'm going to give Bassus a chance to do better against the Ripustians. This time he shall have ten ships, if he wants that many, and he can pick his choice of ships, men and stores at Ravenna or at Misenum also, if he likes.

"But there are two conditions. First, you two must be married to-day. Not any later day, but to-day. In the second place you must report him

well enough for duty before he so much as smells at an arsenal. I'll give you two months if a month won't suffice. I think one month might do."

"And now, one question, Corinna," the Emperor said, fixing her with his big, dark eyes; "was it your idea to let me alone without bothering me with pleas and petitions, or was it Bassus that suggested it?"

"It was Bassus," Corinna answered. "In his first letter to me, before anything else, he wrote: 'Don't intercede with the Emperor!' And he repeated it in that letter and in every other."

"Good," said the Emperor, "that is one more reason for reinstating him. He has sense. And so have you. You have been docile in a difficult matter. You will be an obedient wife. Go now and get married. No, no thanks! No thanks! Go and get married. And come back a month from now and show me how fat he is.

"And now go, I've less pleasant and more pressing business to transact."

**THE SKEWBALD
PANTHER**

THE SKEWBALD PANTHER*

HIS face was the face of a man glad all through. He was standing, his knees against the coping of the inner wall. He looked down into the deserted arena, across it, at the great sweeping curve of tier above tier of blank, tenantless, stone benches and up at the sagging, saucered, spider-web of radiating or cross-knotted guy-ropes. Far away on the opposite side of the amphitheater several workmen were busy with those same guy-ropes, had flung some temporary tackle over one of them and were hoisting up a boy to make repairs or adjustments; otherwise the Colosseum was empty save for himself. He had the air of a man enjoying its emptiness. The sun had risen but a few moments before and its slant rays struck on the gayly painted awning-poles and on their gilded ropes. The interior of the building was coolish with the dawn-chill of masonry grown cold under autumn stars, and he kept his new, white, crimson-edged toga wrapped about him, both his arms under it to the wrists. Yet he snuffed joyously at the early air and breathed long breaths

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of its coolness, turning from side to side his uncovered curly head, rolling his gaze relishingly about. As he stood there another head, a big close-cropped, bullet-haped head, raised itself slowly above the top rail of the entrance stairway behind him, a florid, round moon-shaped fleshy face came above the rail and its small, brown good-natured eyes peered at him. Then there came into view a neck, which would have been long if it had not been incredibly thick, nearly as thick as the big head. The owner of the head moved cautiously, like an over-grown boy playing blindman's bluff. He was a man huge in every dimension, wrapped in a very thin, very white toga with a very broad crimson border. As he trod softly round the end of the railing he showed foot-gear of pale green buckskin, much like Wellington boots, but shorter, with a gold crescent on a little gold chain dangling from the top of each. He was followed by an enormous fawn-colored dog; heavily built, square-jawed, short-haired, which moved as silently as he. Padding noiselessly up behind the absorbed gazer he slapped him boisterously on the shoulder. The smaller man turned round.

"Lucius!" he exclaimed, "what good luck brought you?"

"Precisely to find out," said Lucius, "what whim led you in here. I saw you entering,

stopped my litter, got out and followed you. What on earth made you come in here, Quintus? There's no show to-day."

"Show or no show," said Quintus, "this is the Romanest thing in Rome and I am just famished for Rome. I've been hungry for Rome for five years."

"When did you get back?" Lucius asked.

"Day before yesterday," answered Quintus. "Just in time for a good bath and a good dinner. I paid all my official visits yesterday. To-day I'm my own man until lunch-time at the palace and I mean to stroll about and just bathe in the sensation of being in Rome again."

"Well," said Lucius, "while you are bathing, as you call it, you might just as well bathe sitting as standing. Let's sit down."

He settled himself ponderously into one of the ample, heavy-timbered, leather-bottomed, front row armchairs. Quintus took the next. The dog curled up at Lucius' feet.

"Were you at the Emperor's reception yesterday?" Lucius asked.

"I was, my boy," said Quintus, "and very kind he was too. 'You're the right sort, Proculus,' said he, 'you do things. You've earned a rest. Hope you'll enjoy it and go back and do more things. No time to talk now. I've sixteen yoke of horses to look over and I want to get this

tedious ceremonial done. Come to lunch with me to-morrow and tell me your adventures.' Rather gracious for Commodus, don't you think?"

"Most unusually gracious," said Lucius. "Wish I could extract something like that from him for me. Wish I had been there to hear it. I didn't see you."

"I was early," said Proculus, "too early for you. I'll bet you were one of the last half dozen."

"I was the very last," said Lucius with a twist of his face. "And I caught it, Commodus burst out at me.

"Last again, as usual. You are a nuisance, Balbinus; you're one of those unimportant important men that aren't worth noticing and must be noticed. You haven't anything to do but eat and sleep and you do too much of both. I've quantities of things to do far better worth doing than eating or sleeping or ruling and you keep me here in this everlasting tedium longer than there is any necessity for, when I must be here too long anyhow. See you're early to-morrow, or I'll think of something to make you remember. You're too fat!" said he. I never had such a scolding. That's why I'm up so early to-day. I was on my way to the palace, trying to be first. But I have plenty of time yet to be early enough. There is no hurry."

"You are fat," said Proculus, running his eyes over his friend.

"Not a bit of it," the other denied vigorously. "I'm big. Last time I was at Cossa I climbed into the pan of the bale-shed stilyard at the wool-house. I weighed two hundred and sixty. But I haven't a pound of fat on me. I'm all muscle, stronger than ever. Feel me anywhere. And I keep in the best condition. Swimming Tiber three times is nothing for me. I never make it less than five and generally six, and when I'm in Rome I haven't missed a day, except holy days, for years. I look suety, but I'm all hard flesh over big bones and sinews, stronger than ever."

"I believe you are," Proculus admitted after an investigation.

"My wits may be fat, as Commodus says," went on Balbinus. "I can't get over your thinking of coming in here to-day. I might be away from Rome for ten years, and frantic to get back, but I should never think of coming in here when there was nothing going on."

"You think so now," said Proculus, "but if you had had two years of frontier fighting, let alone five as I have had, you'd have thought over a hundred times everything you could see at Rome, you'd want to see them all at once, and you'd get around and see them all as quick as possible."

"You've been on the Rhine, it seems to me," Balbinus ventured.

"Rhine!" Proculus exclaimed. "Not a bit of it. I've been in Dacia."

"But there have been no wars in Dacia," Balbinus demurred.

"No wars!" Proculus ejaculated. "Perhaps not. Do you remember how Opsitius Tanno used to get drunk?"

"Used to," said Balbinus. "He does yet only not near so often. He'll take a notion, you can't tell when, and from beginning with the rest of us like everybody else he'll make each bowl more wine to less water until he's pouring it down pure and unmixed and the strongest in his cellar. He'll keep on till his blood is just raw wine. And then when his fit's over no more till next time."

"Just so," said Proculus. "And you remember what he said to Faltonius Bambilio?"

"Can't say I do," Balbinus ruminated. "What was it?"

"Why after Tanno was well over one of his drinking-spells some of the boys were joking him and Bambilio had to join in, 'You ought to be like me, Tanno,' says he, 'I'm never drunk.' 'No,' says Tanno, 'never drunk and never sober either.'"

"What's that got to do with Dacia?" Balbinus demanded.

"Everything," Proculus replied. "Dacia and the Rhine frontier are just like Tanno and Bambilio. When you've got a war on the Rhine you've got war sure enough. It takes every town, fortress, camp, catapult, spear and arrow you have and every man and boy you can muster to hold the frontier and stave off an invasion. You have to deal with this or that keen ambitious chief, full of dreams of conquest, glory, of wealth and power and ease, backed by a compact coherent nation of devoted warriors, hard fighters all, with good swords, good spears, good shields, good hearts envenomed with envy and hate, and then when they are beaten, you have peace, safe, dependable peace, until the next time. Dacia is different. No definite nations there, no chiefs worth reckoning with, no point of special danger, no period of rest. Just indefinite swarms of insignificant tribes of dirty, runty savages on rough-haired ponies, and only half-armed with bad lances, worse bows, wretched arrows, miserable shields and long raw-hide nooses. They have no dreams, no plans, no intentions. They are always on the verge of starvation, never half-clad nor half-housed. It is just raid, raid, raid, summer and winter wherever they think they see a chance for food or clothing, weapons, cattle, horses or slaves. They keep us going. It is exhausting

work. If you had been through what I have been through you'd be wild for a sight of the Colosseum, even with nothing going on. Not but that I'm impatient to see a show too."

"You'll be here to-morrow, of course," said Balbinus.

"If I don't drop dead first," said Proculus fervently. "And I don't know what gate to go to. Commodus has changed the arrangements and regulations so I don't know where I am entitled to sit. I was hoping he would ask me to a place on the dais with him. But after all the officers on leave I saw at the reception yesterday morning I don't believe there's a chance of that, so many outrank me."

"There may be a chance anyhow," Balbinus told him. "Commodus is a whimmy creature. But most likely he won't. If he don't, come with me. One of Commodus' changes has been granting each Senator the right to bring in a guest to a front seat. I sit just over there, where you see that panel of gouged rollers."

"I'll be delighted to come with you," said Proculus. "I can't be too far forward for my taste. I want to see everything."

"You shall," said Balbinus, "and now let's go."

"Certainly," said Proculus, but he did not move. "Where did you get that dog? I think

he is the biggest, strongest-looking, fiercest-looking and quietest dog I ever saw."

Balbinus settled himself again in his chair.

"That dog," he said, "used to belong to Fonteia."

"Did she give him to you?" Proculus enquired.

"Not a bit she didn't," Balbinus disclaimed. "She never gave me anything but the cold shoulder. One of her uncles sent her that dog all the way from Tolosa. They had him chained up for a door-dog. He used to growl at everybody. He growled at me every day, going in and coming out. One day he was loose and sprang at me. You know when you are surprised you think mighty quick. It came over me all in a flash that Fonteia was so determined to get rid of me that she had ordered the dog let loose just so he could get at me; for a hint you know."

"Pretty positive hint," interjected Proculus.

"Well she had nothing to do with it, I found out afterwards," Balbinus went on. "But that was the way the idea rushed over me as the dog sprang. Anyhow, it made me so furious that, instead of smashing him on the nose, I just caught him by the throat with both hands and stood right there without moving either foot and choked him till he was limp as a towel. I had a half mind to give him a wrench and break his neck, but I was afraid Fonteia would be angry.

So I just flung him into his kennel and went on into the atrium. They were all out in the garden under the big lotus tree. Vedia Philotera was there and Entedia and dear old Nemestronia and some more and of course there were three men to every one of them. I couldn't get near Fonteia. They were all listening to an interminable recitation by one of those pestiferous poets Fonteia always has hanging round. It was all about Tiberius the Divine and his campaigns in Pannonia. Some of it was lively, exploits of Velleius Paterculus, hard fighting up gorges and on mountain spurs, but most of it bored me. Presently I felt something under my chair. Do you know, it was that dog; licking my feet too. The moment he had come to himself he had crawled after me. Presently Entedia smelt him, though how she can smell anything but the perfumery she uses is more than I could ever make out. She objected. Nemestronia backed her up, though why anybody that keeps a pet leopard should object to a clean dog is beyond my guessing. When the recitation came to a pause they spoke to Fonteia. She called a slave to take him away. He wouldn't stir, showed his teeth. She sent for the door-keeper. The dog snapped at him. Then she sent after her slave lashers. They came and all five of them were too few to move that dog. Then Fonteia got up and tried herself.

He snarled at her. Then I said if she would tell me where she wanted him to go I would take him there. And I took him to his kennel and chained him up. He stayed there till I went home and then he broke his chain at one tug, and followed me home: precious scared my bearers were too. He has never left me since. If I want to go anywhere without him I have to chain him up myself. He won't let anybody else chain him. To hold him takes two chains, fastened to rings at opposite ends of his kennel wall. A single chain too strong for him to break is so heavy it drags down his collar even when he is lying still and chafes his neck sore."

"You don't mean to say he goes into the palace with you?" Proculus demanded.

"Oh," said Balbinus, "he'll stay by my litter if I tell him to. He knows that whenever I leave my litter I am sure to come back to it. He's obedient enough. I like that dog. I never liked a dog before. But he'd let me twist his ears off, if I felt like it. He's my dog."

"Thought you said Fonteia didn't give him to you," Proculus remarked.

"Neither did she," said Balbinus. "Next day she asked was I a dog-stealer. I said no, I hadn't stolen her dog, she could get him if she sent after him. She said that wouldn't do, I must bring back the dog and leave him or pay for

him. I asked how much she wanted. She said twenty thousand sesterces. I said that was too much for any dog. She said to bring him back then. Finally I paid her the money. What does she do, but buy a turquoise brooch with it."

"Queer how those red-headed women do run after blue," said Proculus.

"Red-headed!" exclaimed Balbinus. "Nonsense, Fonteia's hair isn't red. It's the finest imaginable gold-copper. There isn't a handsomer head of hair in Italy."

"Certainly," Proculus hastened to admit. "But what about that brooch?"

"She bought it of Orontides," Balbinus went on. "Said she had been wanting it for a year. Showed it to me the next day. I told her I would have given her a dozen of them if she had hinted that she wanted one. She said that was different. I said I couldn't see the difference. She said I was stupid as usual. Anyhow, I have never seen her since without that brooch. She wears it no matter what color she is dressed in, red or yellow, green or violet, brown or gray."

"Don't you understand why?" asked Proculus.

"Not a bit," confessed Balbinus.

"Then you are stupid as she says," said Proculus.

"I suppose so," Balbinus admitted. "I'm generally stupid. I don't understand about

Dacia. I know about the Rhine frontier, there's Gaul to sack on this side and all those ravening kinglets with their unhesitating hordes on the other. You've something to defend and something to fight. But by your own showing no Dacian would ever try to cross the Danube. Why not leave that as the boundary and let the Dacians eat each other up? What is there in Dacia worth fighting for?"

"Dacia, mostly," Proculus replied, the aggressive light of the enthusiast for a new country shining in his eyes. "Dacia is bound to be the very jewel of the Empire. It is no teeming land of easy plenty like Egypt, no trimmed and clipped garden of glorious abundance like Syria or Asia, never can be such a country as Italy or Spain or even Gaul; but it is enormous, and full of possibilities. It has immense plains, flat as the sea, the finest horse-breeding territory in the Empire. It has vast stretches of rolling country, nothing better in the world for grain. It has uncountable chains of mountains covered with the finest timber, full of mines of iron and lead, silver and gold. Oh, it's all worth fighting for, every foot of it."

"What's the use of all that without colonists," Balbinus demanded.

"Without colonists!" Proculus exclaimed. "It's filling up fast, much of it has filled up. The

bridge is jammed from sunrise to sunset, and as I came southward I passed colony after colony. The roads are thronged all along."

"Got roads there, too?" Balbinus queried.

"As fine roads as any in the empire," Proculus asserted. "With good spile bridges at every river and some stone bridges. More than a thousand miles of perfect roads, ditched and curbed, paved and full twelve feet wide. They fork beyond the bridge. One to the westward runs to Porolissum, the middle one strikes Sarmatagete and runs on to Apula, the third swings eastwardly through Maluensis to Zusidava. They are well used all spring, summer and autumn."

"But how on earth," said Balbinus, "can you get colonists to go there in the face of all that raiding?"

"You don't understand," said Proculus. "We keep pushing the frontier back all the time. Where I was fighting in an absolutely wild country the first year I was there, is perfectly peaceable now, not only not a massacre, nor inroad, but no disturbances of any kind, not so much as a murder. The farms are thick set all over the country and the people live on them the year round, entirely fearless."

"What do they raise?" asked Balbinus.

"It varies with the part of the country," said Proculus. "Cattle and horses and sheep on the

plains, wheat and barley and rye on the farmlands."

"No olives?" asked Balbinus. "No wine? No fruit?"

"They'll never raise olives there," Proculus conceded. "But they'll raise vines yet. They are trying everywhere. And they make a sort of wine out of barley. It's not bad when you are used to it. And for fruit they have cherries and apples finer than anything in Italy and in season you'll find as great a variety of garden fruits and fresh vegetables in the town markets as in any town market in Italy."

"Towns!" Balbinus exclaimed. "What sort of towns?"

"Hasty towns most of them," Proculus answered. "Not much better than a winter camp. The colonies run about five thousand persons and they are not rich to begin with. Stone work is slow and dear, while timber is cheap. They build timber houses and fortify the towns with a deep, broad ditch, a high earthwork and heavy log stockade with log towers. But the later colonies are bigger, some of twenty thousand, and they are better equipped. It is wonderful how rich they get in two or three years. Nearer the bridge many of the towns already have well built stone or brick temples, basilicas, baths,

amphitheaters, circuses and other public buildings and fine stone city walls."

"How do they get rich?" Balbinus asked.

"You ought to see the roads," replied Proculus enthusiastically. "Droves of cattle and horses, great flocks of sheep, thousands of wagon-loads of sides of pork, hams and such, endless mule-trains, panniers full of crude iron and lead, yes, and silver and gold, too. The Danube carries fleets of grain and timber ships all summer; they go round by Byzantium."

"The people are well off by your account," said Balbinus.

"They are," Proculus boasted. "It is a cold country, but they will soon be as well-housed as people in Gaul or Britain and they have even a superabundance of clothing and food. Furs are good and cheap, wool and flax plenty. Everybody is well-fed, all the slaves are fat, no one poor anywhere."

"You make it out a fine country, if we can hold it," said Balbinus.

"Hold it!" Proculus cried. "We'll hold it forever. We'll push on beyond the Carpathians up to the Dniester."

"Where can the Empire ever get men for such a conquest?" Balbinus wondered.

"From Dacia, of course," said Proculus. "Dacia makes men. It not only will soon furnish

enough men to hold its own frontier without a single legion from outside, but will push on westward, swing round the Yazyges and swallow them whole, and press on Germany from the rear till we crush it between Dacia and Gaul and colonize it up to the Baltic."

"These are all wild dreams," Balbinus protested. "Come down to facts. How do you hold Dacia now? If what you say is true it is already nearly as well worth looting as Gaul and will soon be richer. How do you hold off all those desperate nomads of the north? You can't set up a cordon of legionaries shoulder to shoulder, over a thousand miles of frontier. You can't ditch, stockade and tower any such endless line of defense. You can't even have posts close together. How do you hold off the raiders?"

"The legions do it handily," said Proculus. "Hold them off and push them back too."

"You can't make me believe that," Balbinus objected. "A legion can't catch nomads any more than a sow can catch larks or a mud turtle can catch butterflies. The raiders must slip in between your posts and tear up the country. As it gets richer and more peaceful they will have more temptation. The first war elsewhere that calls off some of your outpost garrisons, you'll have a series of inroads and the whole province will go up in smoke."

"Dacia will take care of herself in a few years," Proculus argued. "And until then our outposts let no raiders through between them. The savages have learned better. We've plenty of local friendly cavalry, same kind of fellows as the raiders, confident in the backing of the legions, and aching to pay off old scores on their tribal enemies. And we modify the legions to meet the local conditions. Besides their regular equipment every man has a bow and quiver. Out of a legion we get four thousand men fit for volley archery, two thousand of them make good archers and one half of those get to be experts while on horseback. Then a legion can fight afoot with their regular shields and formation or we can use any advisable proportion of the men as archers and shift from one arrangement to the other as we please. Changing their heavy shields for bucklers, we can use as many as a third of a legion as mounted archers. And we can make any combination of mounted and foot fighters we need. We can fight a legion as a whole, or break it into cohorts or maniples and scatter them about. We teach them, besides their own natural methods, the nomad tricks and outdo the raiders at their own game."

"But how do you think of such innovations?" Balbinus wondered. "I have often considered about that. Somebody must have thought of

everything first, I know. But I simply can't imagine it. I can do anything when someone explains it to me. But I should never think of making any variations. How do you do it?"

"Don't know," said Proculus. "Seems simple enough to me. Don't you think it's time we were going?"

"We might go," said Balbinus, rising. "But I've time to spare yet."

Proculus rose and surveyed the building with a lingering, loving gaze. The sunlight now bathed the interior opposite him, although some of the lower tiers of seats were still in shadow, as was the arena, which was, however, lit up by the glaring reflections from the higher expanse of sunlit marble.

"What's that up yonder?" he inquired, pointing to the far end of the arena.

"Oh," said Balbinus, "they're turning one of the animals loose. That's another of Commodus' notions. He says the beasts get dull and stupid in cages and he has the pick of them let out in the arena, one at a time for air and exercise."

"But what kind of a beast is it?" Proculus queried.

"Panther," said Balbinus.

"Nonsense," Proculus objected. "That can't be a panther. A panther is spotted yellow and brown, or is solid black. That creature is black

and white like an Epirote bull or a Carthaginian watch-dog. There never was a panther like that."

"Never was, maybe," said Balbinus. "Maybe never will be again, but there is now. Why you must have seen that brute before you left. She's been here for four or five years."

"Five years!" Proculus exclaimed. "Why no animal lasts five years in the Colosseum: few ever fight twice."

"That panther," said Balbinus, "will last ten years. She has a charmed life. She'll die of old age, like as not. She has fought at least two hundred times. And never varies when she is let out. Watch her." And he sat down.

Proculus, reseating himself, watched as he was bid.

"Watch her," Balbinus repeated. "She always makes for that same panel of rollers over there—the set that is so gouged and clawed—and tries to climb up. She never tries any other panel, and she always tries there at least three times."

The panther loped easily across the sands, crouched, sprang vertically and caught the third of the wooden rollers set along the face of the wall to protect spectators from any possibility of any animal scaling the enclosure of the arena. Her claws sank into the wood, but the lurching

turn of the two-foot roller threw her back upon the sand.

"That was not much of a leap," said Balbinus. "I've seen her touch the sixth roller. Those claw-marks are nearly all hers. You can see from here some on the sixth roller. See, the sun has just reached it. She has never touched the seventh roller. There she goes again."

As he spoke the panther shot into the air. She got a hold on the fifth roller and clawed wildly with her hind legs at those below, but as they yielded to her weight and revolved on their bearings she slipped down again.

"She's only playing," said Balbinus. "When she is really in earnest she does better than that. My seat is right above that panel, almost exactly in the middle of it, and sometimes I think she's going to get her claws over the coping. If I am looking over when she springs it seems she is coming right in my face."

The panther sprang a third time and fell back at once.

"She won't try again," said Balbinus. "Sometimes she tries six or seven times."

She walked nosingly around the edge of the arena, flicking the end of her tail. She lay down, rolled over, sprang up lightly and continued her nosing progress.

Proculus eyed her as she went.

"Did you ever see a black dog that had been scalded?" he asked, "with white hairs grown out on the scars?"

"I have," said Balbinus, "but the white hair would only be in little streaks. She is more than half white."

"Her belly is black," said Proculus, "and her tail is black."

"If she had been scalded over as much of her skin as shows white hairs, she would have been killed," Balbinus argued. "I believe those are natural colors on her. The edges of the white are too irregular for scald marks. Look at her face now while it is towards us. That black patch over her left eye and ear looks perfectly natural."

"Perhaps it is natural," said Proculus. "But I never heard of such a beast."

"You must have heard of her," said Balbinus. "That is the very panther that killed Fonteius Bucco."

"Killed Fonteius Bucco!" Proculus exclaimed.

"Oh well," said Balbinus. "He had no right to the name of course, but he had passed under it."

"But which Fonteius Bucco," queried Proculus, "and how did she come to kill him?"

"Do you mean to say you never heard of the

murder and the trial and all that frightful scandal," demanded Balbinus.

"Lucius," said Proculus. "I have heard nothing for five years except the wind howling over the plains, the moaning of the forests at night, the roaring of great rivers at their fords, the yells of Scythian robbers, the blare of bugles, the whine of well-sweeps and such like noises of campaign or camp. I have seen nothing but camps, or stockaded forts, or miserable, raw, timber towns, or the wild mountains and the weary plains of Dacia. I have had no time to read, no time to talk. It's been day-and-night riding and fighting, or desperately hasty ditching or breathlessly driven sword, spear, shield, helmet, shoe, harness, tent, or tool-making. Little news has reached me and no gossip. Please assume that I know nothing. Tell me everything you know and by all means tell me about Bucco and the panther."

"You remember Decimus Fonteius Bucco?" Balbinus asked.

"Fonteia's uncle?" Proculus asked in turn.

"No," said Balbinus. "Not old Decimus, young Decimus."

"Fonteia's brother?" Proculus queried.

"As you and I knew him," Balbinus agreed.

"A vile whelp," said Proculus. "The worst specimen of a noble family ever I saw. I

detested him. How such an unsavory pup could be Fonteia's brother and Causidiena's son I never could make out."

"He really wasn't," said Balbinus. "But I'll get to that later. Causidiena died before you left I believe."

"I was at the funeral," said Proculus, "and very sorry I was. She would have turned into a lovely old lady like Nemestronia."

"Well," said Balbinus. "Even before she died, what with old Fonteius Bucco's blindness and the invalidism of Marcus, young Decimus was more and more unmanageable. Marcus Bucco never could control any of his children, not even Fonteia. Naturally being the best man of the family Caius Bucco had charge of all the estate, and when his father and Marcus died about the same time, a little after you left, it hardly increased his power over the property. Old Decimus stood out of the way and never claimed any of his privileges as elder brother. Young Decimus kept getting into trouble, and though Caius was kind to him, he quarreled with his uncles continually.

"Then Caius was found murdered, most atrocious butchery too. Everybody thought it was one of his slaves; he was a very reckless man about slaves, bought all sorts with no guarantee of good character and gave them a

loose rein. But when the investigation was no more than started suspicion turned on young Decimus. Proofs accumulated and it was soon clear he had murdered his uncle. He was convicted. Then one of Marcus' slaves confessed that Decimus was her son, she had substituted him for Causidiena's baby, and never been suspected. The legitimate heir had died on her hands before he was a year old. Of course that mitigated Fonteia's shame, but still she had grown up with him as his sister, and felt the disgrace of the trial terribly.

"After he was proved a slave the lawyers had a fine wrangle over the sentence. One lot said he must be sentenced as a slave. The other lot held out that as he had had the status of a free man when the crime was committed and was constructively related as a son to his victim he must be punished as for parricide by a citizen. Then Commodus cut in. He said he didn't mean to interfere with the dispensing of justice but he suggested that, instead of wasting time deciding whether to crucify him as a slave or drown him, sewed up in a sack with snakes, dogs and monkeys, as a parricide, why not compromise on throwing him to the beasts in the Colosseum? That would be more of a lesson to others, as being visible to a greater crowd, and it would be more spectacular. Thrown to the beasts he was.

It was four years ago, four years ago to-morrow. Fonteia was there. She had been sorely tried at first between her genuine dislike for him, her abomination of him as a murderer and her love for her uncle on the one side and her mother's training in family duties and loyalty on the other. Once he was proved a slave and no kin of hers she behaved as if he had never existed. But the spectacle here shook her nerves for all her self-control. I sat on this side then, just where the Vestals sit now, about three panels nearer the dais. She sat with the Vestals, where I sit now above that panel the panther tried to climb. Several batches of criminals had been disposed of when they cleared the arena, sanded it afresh and turned him into it alone. He had nothing on but a waist-cloth, and carried a short club, to let him feel as if he had a chance and to make it interesting. They let out six panthers from six different inlets. Two began snarling at each other at once and paid no attention to anything else. The one nearest the fellow went straight for him, and, do you know, that cowardly scoundrel showed just one flare of courage in his desperation. He ran at the beast, hit it on the nose and drove it away. He scared off the next, too. The fifth was afraid of the crowd and the shouts and all that and tried to get back through the grating down the inlet. While

Bucco had been setting the crowd wild with delight by scaring off the two panthers in succession, that she-demon down there had never moved. When he paused and glared round she began to crawl toward him. The moment he saw her coming he yelled, threw away his club and ran. She never hurried, just crawled steadily. He scudded to that panel of rollers below the Vestals. There was Causidiena, the eldest Vestal, and Fonteia, who had known him as nephew and brother, and Gargilia, the youngest Vestal whose cousin he had courted. It was harrowing to see him run and hear him yell. And the panther never hurried, just kept on crawling. Fonteia sat as if nothing was going on, but the Vestals leaned forward; Causidiena was very bitter over her brother-in-law's murder. Then . . . have you ever seen one of the log-walking contests?"

"I haven't seen one amphitheater show where you have seen a hundred," said Proculus.

"I mean," said Balbinus, "when the arena is flooded and they throw in a dozen or two logs and then offer a prize for anyone who can stand up on one. And first they let a batch of street urchins try, and they wade out to them and scramble on to them and try to stand up and always get thrown off when the logs turn."

"I've seen that," said Proculus.

"And then, you know," Balbinus went on. "Slaves and rabble try and not one of them can stay on a log. Then an acrobat minces out on a slack-rope, and takes a long jump for a log and lands neatly on it and stays there. And he dances and skips and makes the log turn under him and pirouettes and turns flip-flops and walks on it on his hands and stays on."

"Yes," said Proculus, "I've seen that too."

"You know what a peculiar trick of balancing he has so the log never lurches and throws him off?"

"Yes," said Proculus.

"Did you ever see anybody climb arena-rollers with a similar trick of balancing?"

"No, I never did," said Proculus, "and I don't believe it could be done."

"Neither would I have believed it," said Balbinus, "until I saw it. That frantic murderer jumped for the lowermost roller, and somehow got his right arm and right leg over it, hugging belly-flat to it. He hung on when it turned. Then he clung to it with both legs and one arm and got his right arm over the second roller. Then he got both arms round the second roller and steadied himself. Then up went his right leg and he was sticking to the second as he had stuck to the first. The whole audience was dead still, everybody that could see him watching

breathlessly and the rest silent because the others were. The panther never hurried, just crawled steadily, her eyes never leaving him. By the time she was below him he was on the fifth roller and she crouched flatter and flatter while he worked up to the sixth roller. When he put up a hand for the seventh she sprang. Her paws clawed into him, one on his ribs and the other on his left thigh, and she gripped a mouthful of his right flank just above the hip, her teeth must have met in his liver. He gave one frightful screech as they fell together. She landed on her feet and instantly gave him a cuff with her forepaw alongside the head. It tore the side of his face off and must have broken his neck. Then she set her teeth into his throat and lay down flat, holding on. The audience had given one barking shout as they fell and then hushed again. When she lay motionless they yelled over and over. And through it all Fonteia sat bolt upright, fanning herself quietly and keeping her countenance, though she was dead pale. And she has never missed a spectacle since; too proud to give anyone an opportunity to say she stays away because of her memories. She always comes with the Vestals, too. But they were so affected by the panther's regularly repeated efforts to climb those rollers that Causidiena petitioned Commodus for a different place. He

was just making his revision of the seating regulations, and he changed them to this side. Quite by accident my new seats happened to be where theirs had been. I don't wonder they were upset, it makes my flesh crawl every time that brute tries to climb up, not that I am afraid she is coming over, but because she reminds me of Bucco and all that. Fonteia hates the sight of the beast, a hundred times more than I do, I know. I used to hope each show would finish the creature. But she has killed any number of criminals. She has fought goats, antelopes, elks, bulls, buffaloes and all sorts of horned animals. She has set to with dogs, panthers, tigers, lions and come off alive. She has escaped numbers of gladiators, bested some, killed one or two, and been let off by the favor of the audience over and over. When I gave up hoping that she would be killed, I tried to bribe the keepers to poison her. But they wouldn't hear of it. I bid them up to two hundred thousand sesterces, but they said Commodus had taken a special fancy to the beast and they dare not take any bribe to poison her. I would have paid four hundred thousand to get the creature out of the way. I know how Fonteia feels, though she holds her head high at the shows and never mentions the panther at any time. She can't help being reminded of all that hideous humiliation and she not only can't

help remembering the horror of Bucco's death, but she must recall her baby days with him before he developed his ugly traits. It must tear her heart to see that panther. I am sure nothing would please her as much as getting finally rid of the beast."

"By your own account," said Proculus, "you are no nearer winning Fonteia than you were five years ago."

"No nearer and not any more hopeful," said Balbinus. "But just as determined."

"Doesn't the turquoise brooch make you any more hopeful?" asked Proculus.

"I don't see what that has to do with it," said Balbinus.

"That's just it," said Proculus. "You don't see."

"One thing I do see," said Balbinus. "She doesn't seem to care for anyone else. She has any number of suitors, but never treats anyone any better than she treats me; or any worse, for that matter."

"I believe you are more hopeful after all," said Proculus.

"Not a bit," said Balbinus. "Whenever I talk marriage to her she says Helvacius was a man who did something and she'll stay a widow for life before she'll marry a do-nothing. She says if I'd only do something she'd think about it."

"Why don't you do something?" Proculus inquired.

"Can't get a chance to do any of the things I can think of," said Balbinus. "And can't think of any more."

"What did you think of?" his friend asked.

"I went to Commodus," said Balbinus, "and asked for a province. You know the way Commodus looks at you, like a stupid countryman who has not understood what you said?"

"Yes, I know," said Proculus, and he laughed grimly.

"Well," said Balbinus, "he stared at me in his red-faced goggle-eyed fashion and burst out:

"'Make you a Prefect! You manage a province! You never managed anything in your life.'

"'I manage my estate,' I said.

"'Don't put on airs with me,' he growled. 'You talk as if you were your rich cousin. You aren't *the* Caelius Balbinus. Your estate is no wonder. There are a hundred men in Rome richer than you.'

"'I'm not putting on airs,' I told him. 'I know where I stand and what my estate is. Such as it is I manage it.'

"'You do not,' he snapped like a dog. 'It manages itself. You've bailiffs and overseers and inspectors and bookkeepers and managers.

Your father trained them, yes and your grandfather, in the ways his grandfather's grandfather before him didn't so much as start, but only had to keep in motion. The estate runs itself as well as if you had been born deaf, dumb and blind; runs itself no worse and no better. You manage nothing.'

" 'Men less capable than I have provinces,' I said.

"Then he did puff and glare.

" 'You think,' he bellowed, 'because I don't wear a long beard and keep a glum face like my father that I'm a fool. You think because I enjoy a good time and don't consort with dreary old shaggy-faced, shaggy-cloaked philosophers, that I care nothing for the Empire. You think because I love horse-racing and archery and beast-fighting and gladiators and all sorts of really entertaining things, I am no judge of men. I know men. I love best a man who can do things with his hands, a good swordsman or fighter. I love best a man who can distinguish himself in the amphitheater. That's the best kind of man. But I love any sort of capable man. You senators think I hate you all. I don't hate senators, I hate loafers. You are about as active as a row of hay-ricks in the sun. Get out and do something, any one of you, and I'll be the first one to give you credit for it. If it's worth

while I'll love you for it. I know men. You take me for a fool, but you are wrong, all of you. I'm no fool and I care more for the Empire than any man in it. I know whom to appoint and whom to reject. You run a province! You couldn't attend to a rabbit-hutch. You great, bloated, lard-bag, you! you sit like a toad on a mud-bank gaping for flies to blunder into his mouth. You never did anything in your life. Get out and do something.'

" 'What am I to do?' I asked. 'I want a province and you refuse and then tell me to do something. What am I to do?'

" 'Men who do things,' he said, 'don't need to be told what to do, they see things for themselves. If you only once did something I might think of you.'

" 'But what,' I insisted.

" 'What?' he roared in rage. 'Anything! I'd like to see you spit once as if you really meant it; I could forgive you if you'd up and kick me under the chin, if you thought of it for yourself. Go home,' he said. 'Get out of my sight!' And I went. I don't care about the province, and I don't care whether I please him or not, but I do want to do something to please Fonteia. Only I suppose nothing I could do would please her."

"I believe," said Proculus, "that she is much

better pleased with you than you suspect and I believe Commodus likes you too."

"They have a queer way of showing it," Balbinus gloomed.

"You could please them both at once," said Proculus.

"I wish you would tell me how," said Balbinus. "Hang him I say. Yet I shouldn't mind catching his eye. For her, I'd do anything, as you know."

"Do you really mean to say," demanded Proculus, "that you don't see for yourself what to do?"

"Not a bit I don't," said Balbinus.

"Not with such an opportunity staring you in the face?" Proculus demanded. "When the gods have loaded the dice for you and all you need is to make the throw?"

"If you see anything to do," said Balbinus, "you tell me and I'll do it quick."

Proculus looked around. Several gangs of workmen were busy, but none near them. He stood up, walked to the rail of the stairway and peered down it. Then he came back to his seat.

"Now listen to me," he said, "and don't interrupt me till I am done."

Balbinus listened, mouth and eyes open. When Proculus was done he objected.

"It won't work."

"Are you afraid?" asked his friend.

"Not a bit," said he. "It would be easy. But if they refused two hundred thousand sesterces before how can I bribe them now?"

"Don't you see how different this is?" asked Proculus. "They have no dead panther to account for, only a natural failure to notice some rollers out of order, and you won't be dealing with the same set of men, anyhow, not trying to bribe men who have once shied. These will only have to invent a story to explain a perfectly usual occurrence. Did you never know of rollers jamming?"

"Often," said Balbinus.

"There you are," said Proculus, "and now let's go. It's getting hot here and you'll be none too early at the palace by now."

"Your advice is good," said Balbinus. "I'll take it."

Therefore the moon that night looking down into the Colosseum saw a group of figures in the arena by the enclosing-wall. One was a very big man with two attendants. The others were regular keepers of the amphitheater. They talked a long time and there were many explanations and much assurance that there could be no mistake. A bag of coins changed hands.

Next morning, so early for holders of senatorial seats that they found the chairs all about their own still vacant, Balbinus and Proculus settled themselves into their places.

"One drawback about festival days," said Balbinus, "I always have to chain up my dog, I miss him and he misses me. He hates to be chained up."

"I sympathize with him," said Proculus, half shutting his eyes against the dazzle of the sunlit sand, and snuffing joyously at the perfumed air. "I'd hate to be chained up to-day. But don't you think he'd interfere with our purpose?"

"We had best not think of our purpose," said Balbinus, "until the time comes to carry it out. I have never been nervous in my life and I don't expect to be now, but I want to run no risks. Let's forget our little secret until the moment for action arrives. There's plenty else to think of."

"The greatest plenty," Proculus agreed. "And more for me than for you. What makes the sand sparkle so?"

"Notion of Commodus," snorted Balbinus. "His father saved so much money he's afraid he can't spend it fast enough. So he has gold-dust sprinkled over it. Fine bit of fool ostentation."

"Wish he'd save the cost and spend it on Dacia," said Proculus earnestly.

"Can't you forget Dacia for one day?" Balbinus asked banteringly. "Isn't this enough to make you think there never was a Dacia?"

"Indeed it is," Proculus replied.

"Well, forget it then," his friend advised. "And enjoy yourself."

"I can't help that," said Proculus. "It's almost as novel to me as if I had never seen it before."

"Then you ought to be able to answer a question I have heard debated," said Balbinus. "Does the Colosseum look bigger when full or when empty?"

Proculus ruminated, gazing about him. The arena had in it only a few sweepers, the Imperial platform was untenanted save by the sentinels, most of the movable armchairs in the foremost rows were not yet occupied; but the second wider belt of stone seats devoted to the wealthy nobility of lower than senatorial dignity was already well filled; the third yet wider division of stone benches was crowded with gentry; the fourth steepest circle was overflowing with the populace; while behind them, on the uppermost level, was a packed jam of standing rabble.

"I don't know," he answered. "Yesterday it seemed enormous, to-day there is something choky about the crowd. Yet the unvaried variety of all that flickering waving of fans and turning

of faces and moving hands and arms, gives one a sensation of immensity too."

"What strikes you most?" asked Balbinus.

"The flowers," said Proculus.

"Don't you have flowers in Dacia?" Balbinus inquired.

"Dacia won't be forgotten," laughed Proculus. "Yes, we have flowers there, even some roses. But when we have games the spectators just sit on the grass slopes or stand along the edge of the arena like our ancestors of old. You don't see the wreaths as you do here, and there they are mostly made of strange wild flowers, not a bit home-like to see. These are uniformly roses, and such roses! there must be wagon loads of them. When the seats are all full, allowing a dozen roses to a wreath, there will be twelve hundred thousand roses in this building."

"More," said Balbinus. "But hang the wreaths. I'm afraid mine will tilt over my eyes at the critical moment."

"Shall I pull it off your head as you rise?" asked Proculus.

"I'd thought of that," said Balbinus. "Better not. It might disconcert me. I'll risk the slipping."

"We agreed to keep off that subject," said Proculus.

"We did," Balbinus admitted. "But it will

come back. Yet it's not worrying me any. I'm as cool as possible."

"You look it," said Proculus, "and that's more than most of the audience look. I think it will be a hot day."

"It's cool enough here," said Balbinus, "but the upper tiers look hot already."

"I should think they would be," said Proculus. "Piled against each other as they are. I never sat before where I could see the top rows opposite me. You senators get a fine effect here, able to see up under the awning, clear to the arcade and the awning-poles. You can't imagine what a difference it makes."

"I can," said Balbinus. "For I never could see that much before. The sag of the awning, at its inner edge on the farther side, always cut off my view of everything above the top tier of seats."

"I thought it was all because of our location," said Proculus. "What makes the difference?"

"It's the awning," said Balbinus. "It's the lightest they ever put up and it sags correspondingly less."

"What's it made of?" asked Proculus.

"Silk," said Balbinus. "Pure silk. Commodus started the fashion of full complete silk clothing for men and all the dandies are imitating him. Linen and wool for me though, yet. But Com-

modus, not content with dressing in women's textures must needs commit the extravagance of an entire silk awning."

"It's beautiful," said Proculus. "But I should say it is too thin to do much good."

"It's hard to get a satisfactory awning," said Balbinus, "they have tried all sorts in my time. One thick enough to stop the sunrays altogether is so heavy it sags till the inner edge cuts off the view of the upper tiers over the farther side of the arena, and besides it makes the place look gloomy. So does any awning all one color. Brown and gray are coolest, but very dingy. Blue and green make the people look ghastly and the women ugly, white and yellow make a glare no one can endure and red makes the place look hot. This awning is about the best I ever saw. It's light and not too thin, the pattern is gay and the red and yellow, blue and green make a pleasant variety of bright colors on the audience."

"Too much red," said Proculus.

"That's Commodus again," said Balbinus. "He likes red."

"Speaking of red," said Proculus, "what have you on under your toga?"

"Tunic, of course?" said Balbinus.

"But what color?" Proculus queried.

"Crimson," said Balbinus.

"But why?" Proculus persisted.

"I might get scratched," said the strong man, "and I don't want to show it if possible."

At this moment several senators with their wives and guests came to fill the chairs to right and left of them. Greetings, introductions of Proculus to the newcomers and various chat occupied some little time. By and by Proculus came to a lull in his talk with his left-hand neighbor and found Balbinus momentarily disengaged and questioned him.

"Is Fonteia with the Vestals? I can't make her out?"

Balbinus peered across the arena. The Vestals had just entered and were settling themselves in their chairs.

"That's Fonteia in lavender. She's between Causidiena on her right with gray hair, and Manlia; Gargilia is the one with the black hair on the left end."

"Fonteia is too young and too slender for lavender," said Proculus.

"That's what I tell her," said Balbinus. "I say lavender is for fat old women. But she will wear it."

Just then the imperial cortège began to fill the dais and the audience burst into the quick staccato three-bar song of greeting to the Em-

peror, thundering it over and over until he was seated and held up his hand for silence.

At once the shows began. Proculus, watching with unsated eyes the succession of beast-fights, acrobatic feats, and killings of criminals by various beasts, was, even in his interested state, aware of the lack of enthusiasm in the audience. He was too far from the dais to make out the Emperor's expression. Commodus was hardly more than a great hulking, overgrown lad, with all a boy's impatience and petulance. Not much could be expected of him in the way of dignity. He sulked often and at the smallest pretext. Yet Proculus perceived, or thought he perceived, a more than usually obvious posture of bored irritation, of disappointment with the progress of a very tame, usual and uninteresting series of shows. He saw, or imagined he saw, an Emperor wearied with what he had seen over and over and eager for some diversion, something new, something unusual. Fonteia's face he could not read where she sat. It was all one could do to identify a known figure in a known seat at that distance. Yet he reflected that she could not but see Balbinus, the biggest-bodied man in the senate, in the front row. As he looked on with a return of half-forgotten reminiscence, he realized that no one could see everything when so many things went on at once, that no one

group in the arena, still less any one figure, caught the eyes of all the throng.

Yet when the spotted panther appeared from one of the beast-inlets, it seemed to Proculus that all eyes followed her, as, ignoring everything in the arena, living and dead, she galloped in a straight line across the sand. His eyes he certainly kept on her till the coping cut off his view. Then he saw Balbinus slip the toga from his shoulders. Both of them sat well back and strove to appear unaware of what their strained senses expected. That the panther had sprung and had not fallen back they were apprised by a universal yell from all parts of the amphitheater from which she was visible, by an alarmed shrinking back of the senators and their guests near them, by little screams from two ladies who had been looking over the coping and who shrank back abruptly. Proculus pressed himself against the back of his chair and over its left arm, to give Balbinus room. He heard in front of him a scratchy clawing, heard it even above the redoubling waves of excited yells that rang from all around the arena; heard it all the more when those yells subsided suddenly into a tense hush of expectation, when the seventh roller failed to turn.

A paw clutched the coping, a splay paw with four translucent horny claws that slipped on the

polished stone and caught on the interlaced leaves of the carven vine on it, a puffy paw with dingy black hair between the claws. Then beside it and by no means close to it another paw, white-haired and paler-clawed, hooked its talons into the carvings.

A head came up, a head with a black ear and a white ear with irregular marblings of white and black, with two round-pupiled yellow-gray eyes, one looking out of a black patch and one out of a white. It had a moist, black muzzle, and as it rose the lips curled, the mouth opened and Proculus found himself trying to push back his chair as he recoiled from a jagged snarl. He was looking past incredibly white, unbelievably sharp teeth into an unforeseeable immensity of scarlet mouth and throat.

There was more all too audible scratching and the head elevated itself on a black and white neck. Proculus did not see Balbinus move, but he did see a big, beefy, pink hand round that neck, the thumb on the gullet.

The spectators, who had first yelled in mere blind excitement and then stilled in mere unconscious strained attention, saw the panther's head above the coping, saw the senators tumbling over each other to right and left, saw the two occupied chairs in front of her, saw the distracted arena-guards, some ineffectually rushing

for the nearest exits, vainly trying to reach the podium before the animal cleared the coping, some vacillating on the sand below, eager to shoot the beast and fearing to loose spear or arrow for fear of wounding one of the senators.

Then they saw a big, crimson-tuniced figure erect, its long arms stiff and straight out before it, the panther's throat vised inside its big hands, the beast's fore legs beating the air in front of her, her hind legs lashing wildly against the top roller and the bit of wall below the coping. They followed breathlessly the gyrations and throes of the lithe body until it hung limp and motionless, straight down from the unaltering grip of those big hands. Then they stood up and howled, and stamped, yelling wave after wave of cheers till they were hoarse.

Balbinus stood motionless, the panther dangling against the coping, his tense arms streaked with the streams that gushed from a dozen gashes.

When the cheering died of itself he straightened his arms again till the carcass hung clear of the wall, gave it a flirt to the right and flung the flaccid, broken-necked carrion into the arena.

The wave of cheers that followed after he sat down made all that had gone before seem whisperings.

When the first lull came between the gusts of cheers, Commodus, standing up on the seat of his throne, his voice broken by excitement to a cracked falsetto, sent down the whole length of the arena, audible to everyone, a shrill yell of:

"Macte virtute esto Balbine."

The cheering rose again like a storm-wind. It was very pleasant to Balbinus. He sat bolt upright in his chair, his toga wrapped round him to the throat, his arms under it. He was staring across the Colosseum at a lavender-clad figure in the front row facing him.

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AS he penetrated more deeply into the wood, continually scrambling up hill, hampered by his armor and hindered by low boughs and undergrowth, it appeared to him that, slowly as he seemed to advance, he was drawing away from his pursuers. Instead of shouts and widespread cracklings in the underbrush he heard only occasional snappings of branches and the footsteps of but one man. He stopped, listened attentively, made up his mind and turned like a wolf at bay. The fight was brief. In a moment he tugged his dagger out of his pursuer's ribs, drove it three times through his throat to make sure, and plunged it repeatedly into the cleansing earth. Sheathing it he stood up and hearkened. He heard only the woodland noises. Rapidly he divested himself of his armor. Settling his sword-belt anew he continued his flight, bareheaded and still panting, until he gained the lonely recesses of the mountain forests.

There he sat down to consider his situation.

He was of a buoyant disposition and the mere fact that he, unhorsed and encumbered by his

mail, had hacked his way through a press of eager foes, had eluded and outdistanced a hue and cry of victorious and triumphant enemies, appeared so notable an exploit that the thought of it seemed to give him confidence and to cheer him up.

He needed cheering.

At sunrise he had known himself the most formidable, the most dreaded, the most renowned condottiere in Italy; before sunset he found himself a solitary fugitive. He had ridden out at dawn the leader of eight hundred reckless and obedient spearmen; in the dusk he crouched alone, destitute of food, water, friends, shelter or refuge.

He tried to review his chances of life and rehabilitation.

At first he could think of no chances of either.

In any city where he was a stranger he would either be killed at sight as a dangerous alien, or clapped into a dungeon as a suspicious outlander and later handed over, as a peace-offering, to some one of his implacable enemies.

Implacable enemies he had by thousands.

Scores of the cities where he was known had always been his implacable enemies. He had been among their foemen from his childhood. Some he had sacked, some he had helped to sack, others remembered citizens who had died by his

sword in fair fight, had been slain by his men-at-arms, had been butchered by his orders.

Most of the cities where he would be recognized were still more envenomed against him as a perfidious ally who had betrayed them to their ruin or deserted them in their bitter need.

He could not think of any walled-town in all Italy where he could find safety, protection or even mercy.

Merciless to all men, he knew that to him all men would be merciless.

As a lonely wanderer, without money or armor, but girt with a sword and poignard, any village would greet him with volleys of stones and curses; any country-side would band to hunt him like a stray wolf; any farmstead would loose its dogs on him; any laborer, goat-herd or wayfarer would raise the hue and cry against him.

For a while he raged at his luck.

This day was to have set him, secure and above the caprices of fortune, upon the pinnacle of prestige and fame. It had all been arranged. In the crisis of the battle, just in the nick of time, he and his men were to have changed sides, annihilating their frigid associates and winning both the everlasting gratitude of their admiring adversaries and undying glory for himself as a lightning strategist and wily diplomat.

But everything had gone wrong. His employers had suspected his perfidy, had come to an understanding with their antagonists, the battle had been a sham, a parade, an elaborate snare laid to trap him and his company into shame and massacre. At the crisis of the day both leagues had laid aside their age-long enmities and feuds and had joyously united in the pleasant pastime of butchering his men. Many of them had been slaughtered. But some, taught by long service with a leader who had changed sides whenever it suited his advantage, had won honor in a new service by joining in the carnage and helping to exterminate their less facile comrades. Most of his mercenaries were dead, not one of the survivors would ever again own Melozzo Carpineti for his master.

He could hardly believe that he was Melozzo Carpineti.

He resolved that no man should take him alive, that he would never be a prisoner to be taunted, insulted, tortured, shamed.

He thought of falling on his rapier-point, he fingered his throat and half drew his poignard.

Then he remembered Fabrizia.

He had not thought of Fabrizia for years, for ten years at least; at least fourteen years had passed since he had seen her.

He recalled their parting, she leaning out of

the window, he clinging to the face of the castle-wall, his elbows on the window-sill, his toes on his familiar scant footholds in the inequalities of the stonework. He recalled her last kiss, her parting words.

"Melozzo," she had said, "I shall never cease to love you. No power on earth, no wheedling, no threats, will ever make me marry any other man, or enter a convent. I shall be yours until I die or until you return to claim me. Every night, while I live, my lamp shall burn at this window as to-night, so that you can see it across the valley. Every day I shall wish for you, every night I shall expect you. I shall never change or forget."

Melozzo Carpineti stood up, made sure of his direction and began to work his way southward. His first care was to find a rivulet, to make sure he was the only man in that solitude, and to drink his fill; then, all night he made his way along the mountain-side keeping well down from the crests of the ridges, but following their general direction. The night was clear and he guided himself by the stars. Towards dawn he found a well-hidden nook and curled himself up to sleep.

He wakened near sunset, famished, but not yet weakened by fasting. He was well pleased. Another night of thridding the hillsides ought to put him well beyond peril from any organized

pursuit. He had escaped his relentless enemies and infuriated allies.

The next morning he had luck. From his hiding place he overlooked a hut and saw its occupants go off about their daily tasks, goat-herding and such like. Venturing near he found the hut indeed untenanted and stayed his hunger on cheese and rock-hard bread. Likewise he took with him a supply of both.

Steadily then, without hurry, sleeping by day and slinking by night, he made for Vola. Good fortune attended him. The weather was dry and warm; he thrived on the food he was able to steal; twice only did he have to fight for his life, and then he left no adversary alive to betray him; he slept soundly; he was a ragged scarecrow, but strong and lithe as a panther.

During the twenty days of his journey, he had plenty of time to think. His thoughts at first surprised him, then absorbed him so that they seemed merely natural. He did not plan or fear for his future; he did not brood over his past; he forgot his treacheries and crimes, his feats and triumphs, his disappointments and failures, his hatreds and ambitions. He thought only of Fabrizia. It seemed to him that, somehow, deep inside of himself somewhere, he had always loved Fabrizia. Certainly there could be no doubt that he loved her now, loved her consum-

ingly, loved her more every day. His flight ceased to appear to him an escape from doom and a quest for security. He forgot both the imminence of danger and the prospect of safety. His advance seemed a pilgrimage towards Fabrizia. She appeared the only prize in the world really worth striving for. The goals towards which he had striven so eagerly for so many years all of a sudden seemed to him the veriest trifles, matters of no importance.

His one aim in life was Fabrizia. To find her, to possess her, to make her happy, to atone to her for the long years of his neglect. He was indifferent to peril or dominion. He desired only Fabrizia. He longed for her hungrily, frantically.

Before dawn of the twentieth day of his skulkings he descried, far ahead to his left, the unmistakable, familiar, well remembered outline of the great castle of Vola. That was only a glimpse. It required a long night of his utmost effort to bring him near enough to behold at the next dawn the bold grim shape of Vola, dominating the landscape from its magnificent location on the end of a sheer mountain-spur. Then he was on the wrong side of it and had to work round it in a long circuit before he found himself in line with Fabrizia's window. There he slept.

In fact, he overslept.

He woke in the pitch dark, under a moonless, starless, cloud-obscured firmament. Everything about him was inky black, except, far across the valley, a pin-point of radiance.

Fabrizia's light!

The instant he recognized it every conceivable and inconceivable misgiving began to torment him. Like a swarm of impish gadflies they buzzed inside his brain, like virulent gnats they tortured him. Never once did he doubt Fabrizia. If she were in fact alive he was certain that she was expecting him, love in her heart, eager to do all she could to welcome, to succor, to protect, to relieve him. But all the other Disvole had hated him consumedly and they were the most unrelenting, the most pertinacious, the most rancorous family in all Italy. For tenacity of purpose, for subtle craftiness in revenge they surpassed any stock on earth. He feared them, frankly he feared them. He shuddered, shuddered undisguisedly as he thought of them.

Grim old Zenone Disvola, Fabrizia's father, was dead, he was sure. He had heard of his death too circumstantially to be in any doubt as to that. Also, he would now be of an incredible age: he had been a very old man fourteen years before. Melozzo knew he would not have to reckon with old Zenone's icy malignity. Also he

seemed to have heard of the deaths of Vincenzo and Romualdo, Fabrizia's two brothers. He could not make up his mind whether he had heard that they were dead, or had heard some ephemeral rumor, soon contradicted. He ruminated, inclined first to the notion that they were out of the way, then to the opinion that he had no grounds for supposing them dead. There was little comfort for him in either supposition. If they were alive, if either were alive, he had to expect hatred only a shade less malign, less ingenious than their father's, and if they were gone, there remained Bauro, Bauro the Bastard, brawny, sinister and ferocious. He shivered at the thought of Bauro.

Bauro or Romualdo or Vincenzo, it was all one to him. He stood up, his purpose indomitable. He would go straight to Fabrizia's light. If she was alive and waiting for him, he would reward her as far as lay in his power for her loving fidelity. If she was in duress and the light a lure, at least she might have the poor satisfaction of knowing that he had remembered, that he had returned, had tried to reach her. If she was dead, and the light indeed a decoy, he would at any rate find out the truth. His life was little to pay for that, now. If she was not in the world the world meant nothing to him. As well one death as another. In his days of

brooding in the forests Fabrizia had revealed herself as all the world to him. If she was not in it the world mattered nothing. Nothing mattered but Fabrizia.

In this exalted mood he started down into the valley. Within an hour his feet were on the old familiar path, the path his feet had trod so many nights in his golden youth to reach the stolen kisses of his unattainable darling. To-night he found the path unaltered. He crossed the Latte at the old ford, and not a stone seemed a finger breadth out of place. He breasted the ascent.

At the cleft rock, where he used to hide love-letters for Epifania Varese to find and carry to her mistress, where Epifania used to leave missives for him to find with tokens warning him that he must not venture further that night, or other tokens, assuring him that the coast was clear, at that cleft rock he halted.

He felt in the cleft. It was empty, of course. He unbuckled his belt and bestowed it in the hiding place. One might enter Vola sword in hand, clad in mail, at the head of six hundred men-at-arms. One might enter Vola weaponless; either was rational, though venturesome. But to enter Vola, unarmored, yet with a sword and poignard, was to seem ridiculous. Melozzo had committed crimes and blunders, but he had never made himself ridiculous. Bareheaded and

weaponless he climbed the steep rock path, the path that he alone had ever trod, a path that a goat could hardly have followed. His feet knew every inch of it.

Above him the brute bulk of Vola, haughty and menacing, loomed huge against the darkness.

When he stood on the narrow ledge below the castle wall, he leaned against the stone until his breathing quieted. Staring up he saw the battlements, a solider blackness against the sable firmament of cloud. Also he made out above him to the right the faint outline of that great iron bar, projecting from the coping, from which the lords of Vola were in the habit of hanging whomsoever it seemed good to them to hang.

He smiled to himself in the dark.

When he felt rested he began the last stage of his ascent. His fingers found at once the familiar handholds and his toes the inch-wide footholds in the masonry. He clutched the sill at last, drew himself up and looked into the room.

It was unaltered in fourteen years, the vaulted ceiling painted in arabesques, the rich tapestries hiding the walls, the stone floor bare, the whole empty save for two chests against the arras and the big table midway of the floor, and two arm-chairs. On the table stood two lamps; one at its nearer edge, a lamp with a tall standard, the lamp that sent its rays across the valley; the

other stood at the further corner to the right, a lamp with a short foot, its flame near the table-top. By the shorter lamp sat a woman embroidering.

It was not Fabrizia!

At first he did not recognize her. Then, just as he knew her, fourteen years older and stouter, for Epifania Varese, she turned and saw him.

"Ecco!" she said. "Il Signor Melozzo! Entra, Messer Melozzo."

She stood up.

Melozzo put a leg over the sill, pulled himself up and vaulted to the floor.

"My lady will be overjoyed to see you, Messer Melozzo," spoke Epifania.

The tattered, grimy specter of Melozzo Carpineti before her eyes had appeared to crouch and shrink away. At her words he flushed a hot brown-red under his month-old scrub of beard and seemed to swell and grow as she watched him. His chest expanded. Fabrizia was alive and free!

Epifania clapped her hands. Presently two pages, rubbing sleepy eyes, entered the room. Epifania gave them succinct orders. At once, deferentially, they conducted Melozzo into an adjoining apartment of three rooms. In one they bathed him, shaved him and combed his long hair. In the largest they set him, clad only in

a bath-robe, before a table spread sumptuously with viands: cold pigeon pie, cold roast wild-fowl, cold ham, bread and olives, a variety of sweetmeats, and two great flagons of wine, one white, one red. There by the light of six lamps he ate his fill. Then in the third room his attendants composed him in a big, soft bed.

He slept soundly.

When he woke it was broad day and the two servitors were watching him. Obsequiously they inquired whether it would please Messer Melozzo to rise. Deftly they habited him in luxurious garments, fit for a great lord, but without belt, dagger or sword. Respectfully they led him in the large room where he had supped the night before. There was no crumb of food there, this time. There they left him, closing the door behind them.

A moment later the door opened again. Melozzo looked up. In the doorway stood Bauro Disvola, swart, vast and truculent, hand on hilt.

Melozzo stood up.

They eyed each other.

Bauro spoke, suave as a troubadour.

"Greeting, Messer Melozzo."

"Greeting, Messer Bauro," Melozzo replied.

"May I come in?" Bauro asked, urbanely.

"Enter, Messer Bauro," said Melozzo.

Bauro closed the door, swept the room with a swift glance and said:

"Let us be seated, Messer Melozzo."

They took chairs. Bauro pulled his close up.

"Messer Melozzo," he said, "my father and brothers detested you more than any other living being. They foresaw the eventuality of your return here. They laid their plans accordingly. They gave explicit directions. You know the family history. The Disvole have always been vengeful, but they have never been satisfied with any brutal and obvious revenge; they have had a pretty taste in retaliation and their vengeance have been delicate, fantastic, recondite.

"I must now tell you, Messer Melozzo, what I have never told any man, what I shall never tell any man but you.

"After our father's death Vincenzo neglected me, ill-treated me, insulted me. I had no reason to expect any better treatment from Romualdo. Vola, you should know, is not a fief held from the Emperor, from the Pope, from any overlord. Under God the lord of Vola owns no master. Vola belongs to its possessor, absolutely, without qualification. Its owners may sell Vola, may give it to anyone whim suggests, may bequeath it as caprice prompts, being accountable to no higher authority. When its holder dies Vola

passes to the next heir, who for it does homage to no suzerain.

"With Vincenzo and Romualdo out of the way Vola must pass to me or to Fabrizia. I was exceedingly popular with the garrison and vassals. Fabrizia was as docile to me as to Romualdo or Vincenzo. Considering all that I sounded a medico. He declared himself my man, promised a sure and swift poison, and gave me what he prepared, with instructions. Vincenzo died at once and painlessly, without any suspicion. But the poison worked on Romualdo differently; curse him, he was tougher or protected by magic. It worked, but it worked slowly. He knew himself a dying man, but he did not die at once. He suffered and he suspected. The medico was tortured, he confessed. I was pounced upon and haled to the upper room where the high door opens out over the cliff beneath the iron bar. The door was wide and across its sill I saw the Latte a ribbon of blue-green water a thousand feet below at the bottom of the valley. The rope was ready, rove through the pulley at the end of the bar, the executioner held the noose in his hands. Romualdo was there, writhing in his litter, groaning and gasping, his face contorted with agony.

"'Bauro,' he said, 'you are meat for the crows. You should have swung beside your apothecary

leech. You shall, if I give the word. You are a murderer. You killed Vincenzo, you have killed me. I am a dying man. I shall not live to accomplish what I most desire. But I should like to die knowing that what I most desire will be brought to pass after I am dead. If you will swear to carry out my instructions you shall not hang to-day. You shall have a respite until such time as you hand Vola over to your successor. You shall have a chance, a small chance, one chance in a million, but still a chance, of living after you hand over Vola to your successor. Meantime, be it days or years, you will be Bauro Disvola, living and lord of Vola. Will you swear to carry out my instructions?’

“I looked round the room, I looked out of the open door in the wall, down at the valley of the Latte, up at the blue sky.

“‘I will swear,’ I said, ‘and I will carry out your instructions.’

“Then, grunting and wheezing, he gave me his instructions, his tortured head on one side, his wry face leering at me.

“I was dumbfounded at his instructions as you will be astounded when they are carried out. I swore to carry them out.

“‘Yea,’ said Romualdo. ‘You swear and you shall swear a very different oath, a very different oath.’

"Then they carried him in his litter all the way to the shrine of the Madonna of Lattemaggio, they haled me all that road. Before the statue of the Madonna they set me, he in his litter behind me. There he made me repeat his instructions, word by word, my hand on the knee of the Madonna, on the worn shiny spot on her knee, where the blue robe has been rubbed smooth by the hands that have been laid on it by men taking solemn oaths, making solemn vows. So standing, my hand on the blue robe at the Madonna's knee, I rehearsed his instructions and I swore.

"Romualdo grinned, a twisted grin.

" 'Let him loose,' he said. 'Give him his sword and poignard.'

"They girt my belt on me.

" 'Men,' said Romualdo to the guard, 'the moment I am dead you are to take orders from Messer Bauro as you take them from me, as you took them from Vincenzo, from Ser Zenone. The moment I am dead Messer Bauro is lord of Vola.'

"Back to the castle we fared. In the courtyard Romualdo repeated to all the garrison what he had said to the guard in the church at Lattemaggio. Before sunset he died. For six years I have been lord of Vola.

"Now the time has come for me to carry out

his instructions, instructions very little to my taste, wholly contrary to my taste. But you comprehend, I swore with my hand on the knee of the Madonna of Lattemaggio."

• Bauro was mottled as he spoke the last words.

Melozzo nodded, sympathetically. He had broken oaths without number, but he knew that, had he sworn an oath by the Madonna of Lattemaggio, his hand on her knee, that oath he would keep to the last particular.

Bauro stood up.

"You are hungry, Messer Melozzo," he said, "I also am hungry. Let us proceed with the first part of my instructions, which are likely to please you well. You are to be shriven, houseled and married. Then we are to have breakfast."

"Married!" Melozzo's mind leapt at that word. It would be like the sly indirection of the Disvole to plan to marry him to some horrible creature and afterwards to parade Fabrizia before him. He resolved that no threats, no tortures would force him to marry anyone but her. To meet the utmost test he steeled his fortitude.

He had no need of it.

In the courtyard he beheld Fabrizia, arrayed as a bride, accompanied by four bridesmaids; Fabrizia looking not a day older to him than she had looked fourteen years before; Fabrizia, looking so girlish and so lovely that he could not

believe her thirty years old, that he could not credit what he saw.

Across the courtyard she smiled at him and he smiled at her. Separately they entered the chapel, separately they were confessed and absolved. Melozzo felt the load of his crimes fall from his shoulders, felt himself a new man, made clean for Fabrizia. Together they knelt or stood through the long ordeal of a nuptial mass; side by side on their knees, they received the host. Side by side, her hand on his arm, they left the church.

Except that he was without sword, poignard and belt there was nothing to remind him that he was anything else than a chosen bridegroom, a beloved brother-in-law, a welcome guest. The breakfast was lavish and savory; Bauro, at the head of the board, beamed at the guests, the great hall was bright with flowers and gay with banners.

After the breakfast they were conducted to Fabrizia's apartments and there left alone, Epifania and one of the pages within call. Undisturbed they passed the day together as they pleased. Alone together they dined and supped.

They told each other all their lives during those long fourteen years, he recounting numerous exploits and adventures; she telling of the slow monotonous life at Vola.

Again and again she clasped him crying:

"Oh, my love, I am so frightfully afraid Romualdo has planned some hideous pang for us, some unforeseeable ingenuity of deviltry!"

But when he strove to conjecture what might impend over them, she stopped his mouth with kisses.

"At least," she said, "we have this day, this hour, this moment. Let us not waste an instant of what we have, let us make the most of every minute."

Next morning they slept late, when they were dressed they were summoned to breakfast in the great hall.

Again everything was as friendly and pleasant as possible. When the breakfast was over two pages brought in a huge tray filled and heaped with magnificent jewelry. By Melozzo they halted.

"Messer Melozzo," spoke Bauro from the head of the table, "it is known to you that it is customary for a bridegroom, if he is well-content with his bride, to make her a present on the morning after their bridal night."

Melozzo, eyeing Bauro, eyeing the jewels, said nothing.

"Messer Melozzo," Bauro continued, "are you well satisfied with your wife? Is she all you

anticipated? Did you find her as you expected to find her?"

"Yea," Melozzo exploded, "I found her faultless, body and soul; I found her all any bridegroom could wish for, more than any bridegroom could hope for."

"Such being the case," Bauro went on, "it is fitting that you present her with a morning-gift. Choose then from the treasures on the tray. You may take what pleases you, but only so much as you yourself can here and now place upon your bride, only so much as she herself can wear becomingly at one time."

Suspicious, darkly pondering, puzzled, wholly perplexed, Melozzo examined the gems and gold, conning them, lifting them, rummaging among them.

So overhauling them he considered Fabrizia. She wore not one single jewel. The neck of her gown was cut low and round and the brilliant light blue of the silk emphasized the whiteness of her neck. Her small ears were exquisitely shaped and placed.

After he had delved all over the tray Melozzo spoke to Bauro.

"Messer Bauro, I should like to adorn my bride with a necklace and ear-rings. I find none."

"There are no ear-rings among those ornaments," Bauro answered. "There is no necklace

among them. Be content with what you find, Messer Melozzo. There is a duke's ransom on that tray."

Melozzo chose a high filigree comb set with rubies and emeralds, a sort of diadem that matched it, bracelets the gold of which was almost hidden among the sapphires they carried, and a belt on which turquoises and sapphires cut flat and set deep, alternated, close together, with little gold showing between and around them.

When he had loaded Fabrizia with all she could wear at once he said:

"I have chosen, Messer Bauro."

Bauro dismissed the pages.

When they were gone he said:

"Ask your wife to stand up, that we may judge of the effect."

When Fabrizia had turned round he asked:

"Are you proud of her, Messer Melozzo?"

"The archangels in heaven," Melozzo replied, vehemently, "are not so proud of the Madonna."

"Are you tired of her yet, Messer Melozzo?"

Bauro went on. "Do you find matrimony tedious? Have you been married too long?"

Melozzo swore aloud, a solemn oath.

"By all that and more," he said, "no man would ever weary of Fabrizia. A thousand years would be too short a time in which to enjoy Fabrizia."

"Let us go outside into the courtyard," spoke Bauro.

Hand in hand Melozzo and Fabrizia walked, Bauro beside them. At the door he said:

"Look behind you, Messer Melozzo."

Melozzo looked. Half way down the hall, between them and the tables, a double line of men in mail, standing shoulder to shoulder, extended from wall to wall. The rear rank advanced with arms locked, a human chain; the front rank carried their daggers bare.

"What is this, Messer Bauro?" Melozzo queried, his eyes on Bauro's, his voice steady.

"Merely a reminder, Messer Melozzo," Bauro answered, "that we go forward into the courtyard, that there is to be no retreating."

Melozzo turned his back on the armed men and paced sedately towards the door, his hand in Fabrizia's.

Outside he beheld the courtyard lined with a similar double row of men-at-arms, rear rank elbows interlaced, front rank with naked poignards.

Also, he saw midway of the pavement, the block, and beside it the headsman leaning on his ax.

Melozzo, all an Italian and therefore half a mystic, was capable of quaking endlessly at peril barely guessed and wholly indefinable. Before

the face of unescapable doom he became valiant, almost elated. He drew himself up to his full height, stiffened his shoulders, threw out his chest, held his head high, and trod straight towards the block. A pace further he felt his shoulders seized by two heavy hands and knew that two big ruffians had approached him from behind.

He pressed Fabrizia's fingers, loosed his hold on them, dropped his arms to his sides.

"Addio, Fabrizia," he breathed, his eyes on her face. She was regarding him strangely. Somehow not her blue-clad shape, not her jeweled hair, not her inscrutable face made most impression on his vision. He seemed to see only her slender white throat.

Then, to his disdainful, insulted amazement, two more burly varlets caught him by each wrist, two hulking bullies flung themselves flat on the pavement and seized each of his ankles, and the giant of the garrison caught him round the waist from behind, locking his hands before him.

"What?" he thought, indignantly, "eleven rascals all at once to hold one prisoner? Do they expect me to struggle like a child?"

Clamped to the pavement he looked at Fabrizia. She was a pace or two before him, gazing back at him over her shoulder, gazing wistfully. Her bare white neck shone.

"Addio, Melozzo," she said.

She took another pace.

A man at arms on either side seized her by the elbows.

She took another pace.

Then, all at once, Melozzo realized that he was held stationary to watch her being led to the block.

It took every thew of his eleven guards to hold him fast. Like a wild beast he strained and strove.

In vain!

His fury of effort had blinded him. In his relaxed helplessness his sight cleared.

He saw Fabrizia kneel.

He shut his eyes, he could not look.

He kept his eyes closed until the gripping hands loosened and he stood free.

Then he gazed, he saw the huddle of silk that had been her body, the spout of blood across the stones, the head, the head, red neck up!

He looked away, looked about him.

Beside him stood Bauro, no longer florid and ruddy, but lead-gray all over his huge face.

Then he was aware of a page offering him a sword-belt. The belt was new, but he recognized his own dagger and sword which he had hidden in the cleft-rock.

"Gird yourself, Messer Melozzo," spoke Bauro.

Mechanically he fastened the belt about him.

The feel of the sword at his thigh half restored him to sentience. He heard Bauro speak aloud:

"Hearken all men. Here before you stands Messer Melozzo Carpineti, lord of Vola. He has been lord of Vola since the death of Ser Romualdo. For six years I have been his deputy holding his castle for him, awaiting his return that I might deliver to him his own. From this moment you are to take orders from him as you took orders from Ser Romualdo, from Ser Vincenzo, from Ser Zenone. Salute the lord of Vola!"

The salute crashed out from every throat.

Bauro mute bowed low before Melozzo.

"Messer Melozzo," he said, "you are now lord of Vola. These men will obey your orders, your orders alone, any orders of yours."

"Any order of mine?" Melozzo queried.

Bauro, his face ashen gray, echoed:

"Any order of yours."

"Messer Bauro," said Melozzo, "you Disvole have a pretty taste in vengeance."

"A pretty taste," Bauro echoed, even grayer.

"You Disvole," Melozzo continued, "will give much for vengeance."

"We will give much," Bauro echoed.

"Even sometimes your lives?"

Again Bauro echoed.

"Even sometimes our lives."

**THE FLAMBEAU
BRACKET**



THE FLAMBEAU BRACKET*

GENTLEMEN, calm yourselves, there is no occasion for an uproar. Be seated again, be seated, all of you, I beg. Honor me with your attention for a moment. Signor Orsacchino has called me a murderer. He need not repeat the epithet. We have all heard it. Some of you gentlemen—I did not recognize the voices—so far forgot yourselves as to suggest that I should cross swords with Signor Orsacchino here and now, or that I should call him out and fight him at once. Gentlemen, I brook no suggestions as to what I should or should not do upon any point of honor. I permit no man to school me as to when or to what extent I should consider myself offended. Still less would I fail to resent any question of the propriety of my ignoring what other men dare not ignore. Signor Orsacchino has shown his courage by applying to me, before so many of you, a term of such serious import. He can incur no dishonor by hearing out in silence what I wish to say before we proceed to a final settle-

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ment. As victor in some score of duels I pray your indulgence if for once in my life I depart from my habits, and instead of fighting at once and keeping silence, talk first and fight afterwards, or not at all. You, as my friends, will do me the honor to listen to me. Signor Orsacchino, as my enemy, will do himself the honor to hearken. A young man, and one who has never yet taken part in a serious combat, he has exhibited his conscientious conviction of the justice of his views, and proved his valor and daring by bearding a master of fence who, in fifteen years, has never failed to kill his man. As a skilled swordsman I should feel myself a murderer indeed were I to take upon my soul his blood in haste. The Signor is young; the wine has passed rather freely; we are heated. I say earnestly—let no man interrupt me—that if Signor Orsacchino to-morrow in cool daylight chooses to reiterate his words, I shall take them as a deadly insult and shall challenge, meet, and slay him without compunction. If, on the other hand, after I have told my story, he does not repeat his accusations, I shall regard them, all of them, as not merely withdrawn, but as things never said at all.

Signor Orsacchino has called me a murderer because I killed in a duello his kinsman, General della Rubbalda. That was more than fifteen

years ago, and it was my first formal duel. So far from being a seasoned fighter who butchered a feeble and heartbroken old man, I was then a boy, very raw, and to a great extent unpracticed, pitted against a cool, dexterous, and envenomed adversary. In the many encounters through which I have since passed I recall not one which taxed me more severely or in which I ran a greater risk. In fact, the General would assuredly have killed me had he not chosen to fight with a sword, a perfect mate of my own, which I knew and recognized—a sword the sight of which converted me from an excited lad into a being strung far beyond the reach of any personal or paltry emotions; a thing all muscle, nerve and will, perfectly co-ordinated; an infallible supernaturally accurate incarnation of unhurried, predestinate vengeance. We met in the meadow outside of the river gate. Our seconds are all alive, men of unimpeachable integrity, nobles of the loftiest traditions, of the most honorable lineage. There were other witnesses of the fight which was scrupulously fair, and which I won by mere force of right and justice. I believe that, when I have had my say, all of you and Signor Orsacchino not least, will admit that I had just cause, more than just cause, for any vengeance upon the General—that to treat him as a man of honor and meet him sword

to sword was a condescension upon my part. So far from having forced him to meet me, his challenge to me was simultaneous with mine to him. Signor Orsacchino has insinuated what, if he were ever to put into words—no, Signor, hear me out, you may then say what you please—I should resent far more bitterly than the epithet of murderer. You will all recall the sudden and lamented death of Signora della Rubbalda, more than two years after that of her husband. You will all remember that she, the most beautiful woman of our city, who was mourned by unsuccessful suitors beyond any count, left behind her a reputation for saintliness, such as few women have ever attained to. I had, indeed, seen the Signora before my combat with her husband, but I say solemnly that until the Carnival ball I had never spoken to her, that until the morning after, just before the duel, I had not known whom I so admired. I admit that he challenged me upon her account, but his jealousy was as insensate as the spleen that drove him, whose household had escaped loss, to press an imaginary grievance upon me, whose house was most desolate of all, upon a morning of general sorrow and desolation.

If the story of my grievance—all too weak a word—against him, has never before been told by me, it is not because I have any reason to be

ashamed of it, but rather chiefly that I was not willing to smirch the name of della Rubbalda with a tale of villainy so cynical, and, after the custom of our family, I reserve everything involving penitence or repentance for my confessor. You shall judge whether I am right in confessing to you all. I shall detain you but a few moments longer.

Without penitence I cannot speak of my brother Ettore, at the thought of him I am convicted of ingratitude, that most universal, most unforgivable of the sins of youth. I failed to appreciate my brother Ettore. He was to me not merely a beloved comrade, he not only more than filled for me the place of the father I had lost, but also of the mother I had never known. His tenderness was as exquisite as his precepts were wise, his concern universal, his care constant. I loved him, loved him with the ardent adoration of an unproved boy for a young, handsome, accomplished cavalier who is and does all that the boy longs to be and do. Yet, although he stinted me in nothing, fulfilled for me all my reasonable desires, granted most of my wishes, humored my whims and bore with my moods, some malignant fiber of my heart drove me into perpetual opposition to him. His solicitude irked me; for, with a boy's folly I mistook stubbornness for resolution, recklessness for valor, and

self-assertion for independence. I misconstrued supervision as espionage. Resenting it I began by evading perfectly natural questions as to my whereabouts and doings. From that I grew into a contemptible habit of petty and unnecessary concealment as to my outgoings, incomings, and occupations. He bore this patiently, not showing any change of his affectionate and kindly bearing. Presently my perversity drove me to run counter to his wishes in first one thing and then another. Because he had advised me to cultivate certain of my associates I drew off from them; because he had warned me against others I made cronies of them, although I liked them little or not at all. I felt myself manlier for this sort of folly. I consorted with persons of dubious character or manifestly beneath me, resorted to quarters of the town I should have avoided. When I should have been diverting and improving myself in the best company possible for a young cavalier of our part of the world, I was roistering—by no means enjoying it—with fellows I heartily despised. I lost much money gaming, yet Ettore refilled my purse without chiding me in words, his manner conveying the just disapprobation I would not heed. I came home many times so late or so early that I found our porter difficult to wake, and more than once was nearly compelled to find shelter

elsewhere. Sometimes I returned so disordered that I shrank from ascending the grand staircase and slunk around the courtyard under the galleries to the servitors' stair. I became habituated to low taverns across the river, where I naturally became involved in wine-room quarrels and street brawls. I flattered myself that I comported myself well in these senseless *melées*. I dealt some shrewd wounds and came off unscathed. I felt all the man, the man of pleasure.

Then one night I was entrapped, I never realized how, in a street fight with several rufflers. One of my comrades fell and the rest fled, and I was left alone, my back to a barred door, facing several blades which I barely kept off, when a tall man appeared behind my assailants, fell upon them without warning and promptly beat them off. After the sound of their fleeing feet had died away in the alleys I found myself face to face with Ettore, wearing a cap without a feather, and a plain brown cloak. He asked only:

"You are not wounded?"

"Not a scratch," I replied.

"We will walk together, if you do not object," he said. "Which way are you going?"

"Home," I answered.

As we traversed the crooked streets, crossed the bridge and made our way home, he kept

silence at first and then led me into some light gossip talk, making no remark upon my silly foolhardiness, nor saying anything relative to his sudden appearance or my rescue.

I should have been touched by his solicitude, but with a boy's folly, instead of being overwhelmed with gratitude to him for having saved my life, I was merely indignant at his having followed me and watched over me, and furious at the thought that he had felt that I, who aspired to be redoubtable, might be—as I was too headstrong to confess I had been—in need of assistance.

After this adventure my perversity was aggravated. I took the most sedulous precautions for my own hurt, doing all I could to preclude the possibility of Ettore's ever again being able to protect me from any possible consequences of the dangers into which I needlessly thrust myself.

Throughout the carnival time I fairly lived away from home, mostly, and this, with Ettore's full knowledge, at the Palazzo Forticello with wild Gianbattista and his wilder brother Lorenzo. I took perverse care that Ettore should not be able to recognize me, changing my dress often and wearing a variety of masks. Throughout the carnival I had been hoping to encounter a lady whom I had first seen the

previous autumn, whom I had caught sight of but twice during winter, whom I had watched for in vain at the Cathedral, and in the search for whom I had fruitlessly haunted every church in the city. It had so happened that on each of the three times I had seen her I was alone. My descriptions had been unrecognizable to those of my friends whom I asked to enlighten me. When I had described her to Ettore he had maddened me by saying that he knew well who the lady was, but declined to tell me, advising me to think no more of her, as her husband was devoted to her and a spleenful, dangerous man. I spurned his advice, but my fevered efforts won me no success. I had no clue to her, and even during the delirium of the carnival time I had sighted no one whom I could take for her. This failure diminished my enjoyment of the week of revelry, but I had at least the satisfaction that I had not seen Ettore. No sense of his presence, of his hovering influence, dimmed the glow of my delight in feeling myself my own master and perfectly able to take care of myself, in getting into scrapes, as I did, and getting out of them as I might, untrammelled.

On the night of the great ball I was dressed as a troubadour and was very proud of my becoming costume. No sooner had Lorenzo and I entered the theater than I saw the lady of my

dreams. She wore a very narrow mask, no more than an excuse for a mask, and was dressed in fanciful garb, the significance of which I did not try to guess, but with the effect of which I was enraptured. She was with a very young man, and after a word with Lorenzo, using the freedom of the festal time, we accosted them. Lorenzo engaged the attention of her escort, while I gained possession of the lady. I may say that we spent the evening together, dancing countless dances, partaking of refreshments, strolling about, or seated on one or another of the benches in the corridors or loggias. So engrossed was I that it was only occasionally that I remembered to look about for Ettore. I never saw him, nor any figure at all suggesting his. But each time I looked among the crowd, the parti-colored brightness of which was accentuated by a liberal sprinkling of cavaliers in black dominoes, all alike slender, youthful, and tall, I saw somewhere one figure that, as it were, stood out among the rest—a tallish spare man of erect carriage, stiff bearing, and moving in a way not at all suggestive of youth, most absurdly and unbecomingly habited as a buffoon, not after the manner of our theater, but in the French fashion, all in white, with a tight-fitting cap and a full false face whitened with flour, a loose, white blouse, with huge, white buttons

big as biscuits, loose, wide, white trousers, and white slippers with white rosettes. This costume, odd enough on a young and plump figure, had an uncanny effect preposterously hung about the leanness of an elderly and frigid form. It was so unpleasantly weird that more than once my gaze dwelt on it for an instant before it returned to peering through my dear comrade's mask at the half-revealed wonders of her dazzling eyes. Our conversation was very innocent, witty we thought, delightful we felt. It was near the unmasking time when, as we gave ourselves to the intoxication of one of the last dances, I heard Ettore's voice whisper in my ear.

"Take care. Do not go home alone. You have been three hours with the wife of the most jealous man alive."

I turned my head, and as well as I could in whirling through the whirling crowd, I looked about for Ettore. I did not catch sight of him, nor of any costume such as he might be likely to wear. I saw only the everlasting parti-colored whirl, the iterated black dominoes, the inevitable misfit zany.

At the end of the dance the youth, whom Lorenzo had removed for me, claimed my partner so peremptorily that I could not but resign her—and she, addressing him as cousin, went off with him. They had scarcely more than

disappeared when, as I stood leaning against a pilaster gazing across the press of dancers who thronged the floor at the dazzling parties which crowded every box of the seven tiers, a woman's shriek filled the hall. The next instant came the cry of "Fire," and almost before the boxes opposite me emptied the blaze ran across the ceiling. I took no part in the mad panic which ensued. I stood petrified, as did a few others, and recovered my senses only when the billows of smoke rolled to the floor. Then, from under dropping masses of blazing decorations, through doors empty save for the trampled shapes of dead or insensible victims of the rush, I made my way from the auditorium. How I so made my way out, and by which door I do not know, the spectacle of the trampled women so sickened me that I marvel I ever escaped at all. For, at the sight of a corpse not of my own making, I have always turned, I confess, utterly a coward. To gaze at a man dead by my sword does not disturb me. I see in it only the evidence that heaven's justice has made use of my hand to give a scoundrel his deserts. But a glimpse of a dead body, that of one not slain by me, makes my head swim, my eyes dazzle, my sinews loosen, my knees knock together. Before such a corpse I am—I may apply to myself what no other man would venture to hint—no better than a craven.

Therefore, I shall never know how I came out of that furnace. I was delirious with horror—a mere animal driven by the primitive instinct of the dread of fire.

The corridors and passageways were almost as full of smoke as the theater itself, and, it seemed to me, more aflame. I dare not venture to say how many stairways I seemed to find ablaze. The rush of the fire drove me in frantic flight hither and thither through several narrow doors and—for down every stair I saw climbing flames—up more than one stair. I realized that I was quite out of the theater and on an upper floor of one or the other of the long-disused, deserted palazzos which flanked it. I could not guess which, and whichever it might be, it was certainly as much on fire as the theater. I recall rushing through room after room all filled with smoke, often turning back, finding no outlet and no way down. Several times I scrambled over heaps of what seemed to be old stage scenery. Once I stumbled and fell, jammed in a forest of broken laths and scantlings. I do not know how I reached the window at which I finally found myself, nor where I was joined by that sinister figure, in the white clown's dress, which I had remarked so often during the dancing. I was first aware of him beside me when I pushed vainly against the shut lattices of the window,

and it was his strength, not mine, before which they gave way—not opening on their hinges, but carrying with them their crazy rotten frames, wrenched loose from the stone work of the window and falling altogether with a splintering smash upon the pavement below.

The noise of their crash struck our ears, while our eyesight was yet stunned by the impact of the hot brilliance with which, as the dislodged woodwork left the window aperture clear, we were flooded, diving upward, as it were, from the smoky obscurity of the interior into an intense ruby glare. We both scrambled upon the sill. There was no balcony outside. We were looking into a courtyard so filled with crimson radiance that not only were the walls opposite us bathed in an intense light, but the dark corners were penetrated by a weird carmine-tinted glow even in the deepest shadows. There was not a human being in sight—the court was deserted. It was of considerable size, paved with big square blocks of black-and-white stone. I could make out on the side opposite us the opening of a wagon archway, yawning like a black throat. No arcades flanked the courtyard, and every window I could see was shuttered fast. There were six stories of windows, and we were at one of the fifth story. The roof cornice beetled above us, the roofs above the court were

silhouetted against the inflamed sky, and overhead poured the vast inverted cataract of sparks which streamed up from the holocaust we had not yet escaped. We spoke no word. He stood upon the left side of the window, I upon the right. My lute I had, of course, thrown away, my mask I had on no longer. I had lost both sword and poignard, my whole belt was gone. I had nothing in my hands, which were torn and bleeding. The buffoon had a naked dagger in his right hand, a piece of rope in his left. He leaned over and scrutinized the outlook, as I did. We were a frightful distance above the pavement, and even had we been lower, dropping to the pavement would have been certain destruction, for precisely beneath us was a long narrow area, about a yard wide, and how deep I could not guess, constructed to let light into some cellar. The coping along its edge, where the pavement ceased, showed as a line of dull light in the appalling illumination. There were no balconies to the windows below us, or to any of those immediately on the right or left of them. About halfway down the face of the wall, from just below the left of the window in which we were to the corner of the courtyard on that side, ran a broad stone cornice, wide enough for a lean man once standing upon it to walk along it without holding to anything. About halfway to

the corner of the court a metal rain-spout ran down, making a conspicuous elbow over the jutting stone shelf. Once set on his feet upon this cornice, either of us was sure of escape. The end of it was not precisely below the left side of our window, but a little to the left.

All this I took in in a moment, so, apparently, did the other man. There were many flambeau brackets projecting from the walls of the courtyard. There was one beside each lower corner of our window. The buffoon took his dagger in his teeth, 'kneeled down, reached over and fastened one end of his rope to the flambeau socket. He did not hurry, but made sure of his knots. Then he dropped the rope and, holding to the bracket with his left hand, shook the rope into undulations with his right, peering down to descry its end. Its end was all of ten feet above the level of the cornice, too far for a man holding the extreme end of it to set his feet on the cornice top. To jump for that cornice, or to drop upon it from even a yard above, it would have meant the certainty of going down to be dashed to pieces on the cruel flagstones below. The buffoon pulled up the rope and stood up, his dagger still between his teeth, projecting from under the false face which it thrust away from his own, and through the eyeholes of which I seemed to feel his eyes fixed upon me. We could hear, above

the roar of the fire, the confused hubbub of shouts from the crowds which thronged the square and the streets round about. I had called for help when first I reached the sill, but my bawling, lost in the steady deep, rumbling note of the fire and in the confusion of voices beyond, won no response. Now I yelled again, screamed, shrieked, but no one heard. The buffoon echoed my outcries, but not as if assisting them, not as if hoping against hope for rescue, not as if, like myself, merely giving way to terror and despair, but rather with derisive mockery in his rallying halloos. I felt totally helpless. If I were to escape at all it would be through him, yet I felt him as an inimical presence and feared him almost more than the fire behind us. He stood with the rope bunched inside his fingers, it seemed to me nervously knotting and unknotting it, then he let most of it go slack, a coil of a loop or two swinging back and forth in his left hand, his face toward me and his eyes I felt steadily on me. The tiny threads of lazy smoke that had been faltering out of the window under the lintel increased from a thin trickle to a continuous stream. Through the door of the room behind us was visible a faint blush of blurred brownish light. As I looked at it I saw the door darken suddenly. A man rushed through it, incredibly alive out of the throttling reek, crossed the room

in a bound, and leaped upon the sill between us. He was all in black—black cap, black mask, black domino, black hose, and his sword in a black scabbard. So swift was his rush, so impetuously did he leap, that I wondered whether he had meant to set foot on the window sill or had expected to land on a balcony outside. As it was, he planted his feet fairly on the sill, but just missed pitching forward into space. He toppled, bent double, and saved himself only by touching the outer sill with the outstretched fingers of his tense arm.

At this instant, as the masked, black domino rocked unsteadily, head and shoulders into the outer air, the zany flung the noose—for it was by no means a snarl of rope, but a cunningly knotted slip-noose, which he had held inside his closed left hand—over the newcomer's head, and, with one lightning movement, half dragged, half hurled him from the sill. In the air the victim spread out arms, legs, and cloak, like a huge bat. His hands windmilled wildly, searching for the rope, and failed to touch it. For a horrid instant, as the rope checked its headlong dive, the inverted body gave a jolted bob upward before it turned, then it lurched over, the hands making one last clutch for the rope, and again missing. The cord drew up straight as a rapier blade and held. The body was violently and

convulsively agitated once or twice, and its sword, tossed out of the upturned scabbard, struck the corner of the cornice with a sharp clang, bounded up, flashing in the red glare, and shot down a long line of light to the pavement. Its owner's corpse writhed sinuously and then merely gyrated limply at the end of the rope. Its feet were not much more than a man's height above the cornice. My abomination of the sight unnerved me so that my impulse to hurl myself upon the murderer was swallowed up in a physical sickness in which I nearly fell from the sill. As I clung to the stone jamb the malignant white shape, dagger in hand, addressed me:

"Sir, I know who you are. I was about to piece my rope with your carcass. Since this intruding stranger has spared me the necessity, and since the rope is now long enough to be useful, I offer you the courtesy of the first opportunity to descend."

Speechless with horror and loathing I tottered, a helpless jelly, against the jamb. He stood, his long dagger in his right hand, eyeing me through his whitened mask.

"Ah," he went on. "You hesitate. You can pass me easily, descend by the bracket, the rope, the cornice, and the rain-spout. You will not? Then you will pardon me if I leave you. You will find it warm here before long. Neverthe-

less, if this place is more to your liking than the street, I do not dispute your right of choice. A good night to you. I am tempted indeed to put this dagger into you before I go. But I reflect that, though you do not look it, you might have the strength and sleight to avoid my thrust, and perhaps even throw me down. I shall not risk it. If you overcome your panic and are not burned here or killed by falling, if, in short, you get down alive and get home, you shall hear from me in the morning."

He leaned over, tore off and threw away his false face and revealed to me a countenance I did not then recognize. Next, his dagger in his teeth, he dived for the bracket, caught it with both hands, swung himself off into space, gripped the rope, first with one hand, then with both, went down it, stood on the dead man's shoulders, let himself down the rope till he clasped the corpse, wriggled down it, embracing it close, dislodging the cloak which sailed down the air like some huge bird and settled upon the pavement far out into the court near the sword.

The escaping villain finally gripped one ankle of the corpse with each hand, swung himself and all above him gently sideways until his feet found the cornice, steadied himself by the feet of the corpse, let go and stood up, edged gingerly along the cornice to the rain-spout, and slid down

it smoothly. Once on the pavement he leaped into the air, clapping his hands and crowing, scampered briskly across the court, stopped to pick up his victim's cloak and sword, turned to glance up at me, waved me a derisive farewell, and, after a hideous caper of joy, vanished into the black throat of the wagon archway, running like a fiend.

My eyes came back to the dangling body, revolving slowly now. Its mask hung beside the neck and the back of the head was toward me. I felt myself doomed. I knew I could never summon up resolution to escape by that road. In fact, I am sure that from losing my hold, as I actually later descended, and being dashed to pieces on the pitiless stones, nothing saved me but the set fixed purpose of vengeance, which made me not a man, but an automaton.

I looked behind me. The glare of the fire was bright through the smoke, dense volumes of which poured out of the window above my head, and the heat of which I could feel.

At that instant came a terrific dragging crash, a brief darkness, and an agonized wail of groaning shouts. The roof of the theater had fallen in. The smoke sucked back through the window above me, and momentarily I felt cool air on my face. The next instant the volume and intensity of the light redoubled as the overarching

stream of sparks became a firmament of fire. The court grew bright to the deepest, darkest corner, eddies of air swept past me, the corpse swung round, its mask blew away wholly. Hideously bowed the head was, the chin driven into the bosom. But I knew the face of my brother Ettore.

THE END

